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Re-thinking Bellah's Civil Religion: The Case Study of John Brown's Commemoration at Harpers Ferry National Historic Park

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"Re-Thinking Bellah's Civil Religion: The Case of John Brown's Commemoration at Harpers Ferry National Historic Park"

Honors Thesis by Sher Afgan Tareen

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Acknowledgements

I suppose ethnographers must always be grateful and humble researchers because we rely on other people to obtain our data. We ask them to carve time out of their busy schedule for us, to speak at length to us, to respond to our questions and in return we reciprocate with a thank you and that's all. As an ethnographer, I am lucky to receive informants who have exceeded my expectations with their willingness to share important aspects of their life with me and to level the amount of interest I show in my research. I am extremely grateful of Dennis Frye, Michelle Hammer, and David Fox to talk about their role at the Park and Autumn Cook for organizing my interviews with them. And how could I forget Rick "Oh Be" Garland? He does not work for the National Historic Park but my hour long interview with him serves as a neat supplement to my analysis of the National Historic Park, not to mention how much I learned about American history from him. As a scholar, I strive to assess the Historic Park and its commemoration of John Brown with critical eyes, but here I confess that I found it difficult to put on my critical lens precisely because I admire my informants and thankful for how they welcomed me. I nonetheless produce a thesis that I hope will positively contribute to the Historic Park's reflection of its role as commemorators of John Brown.

I also want to give a shout out to Amtrak Railway and the Capitol Limited route in particular. Some unknown genius once remarked, "If God had meant for us to fly, he wouldn't have given us the railways". Amen! I consider my encounter of Harpers Ferry as God's blessing. I had barely heard the name of the town or John Brown when I read American history in high school. But on a wintry January evening, I glance out from the

train window and witnessed the pristine town of Harpers Ferry. I knew right away that I will return to this town someday but only later I realized my return to Harpers Ferry would ensue through the production of this Honors Thesis. Amtrak introduced me to Harpers Ferry and led me on a search to learn about John Brown, a figure who is defined in forgetfulness more often than in memory.

Although history textbooks I read as a high school student did not compel me to think about Harpers Ferry and John Brown, I had some of the finest social studies teachers. I dedicate this Honors Thesis to them as a product of their hard work and guidance that instilled me with such immense interest in American history. Mr. Thomas, Mr. Albers, and Mrs. Root, thank you. Now I want to say a few words on my teachers at Macalester College.

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Lastly, I thank my special friend Thomas Morie who drove me to Harpers Ferry on several occasions and is the proud photographer of the picture on the title page. Mr. Morie is an erudite student of American history, and will certainly be the first person to get his hands on this thesis. On one of our trips, we encountered Erik Olsen, a great American who sanctifies his covenant with America with his cocktail drink of V-8 and Bud Light. Sitting on top of a hill overlooking the Harpers Ferry train station, we debated how to solve the miseries inflicted upon this earth and shared joyous stories that revealed our blissful ignorance of world affairs.

I end the acknowledgement section my acknowledging a fine story shared to Thomas and I by none other than Erik Olsen.

Once upon a time, there was a Park Ranger and a Native American named Pancho.
The Park Ranger was strolling around a river and out of the blue, a cobra bit him in the ass.
The Park Ranger ordered Pancho to fetch the local doctor. The local doctor had a grim outlook on the situation.
"Well Pancho, you better suck the poison out of his ass or else he's gone die".
Pancho returned to the sore Park Ranger.
"What did the doctor say, Pancho?"
"You're a dead mothafucker"

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Abstract

This Honors Thesis contributes to the theory of American Civil Religion proposed by sociologist Robert by exploring how Harpers Ferry National Historic Park commemorates John Brown, the abolitionist (d. 1859). In *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, Bellah states "Americans have interpreted their history as having religious meaning" (Bellah, 1992: 2). Like the children of Israel, Americans bind a covenant with their national identity. The American Civil Religion therefore is a religion that mobilizes a national identity. John Brown the abolitionist (d. 1859) complicates the mobilization of the collective American identity as theorized by Bellah because his raid represented an attack on America and a distrust of the American constitution.

I argue that the Historic Park's strategy of neutrality attempts to address the logic of the American Civil Religion but in so doing also reveals Bellah's concern of the 'broken convent' and the unfulfilled promise of a unified American identity. The Park welcomes Americans from all over the country to celebrate a shared heritage of the American Civil War era but maintains a neutral stance in retelling John Brown's raid because the Park fears that the contentious memories of Brown during the time of his raid linger amongst contemporary Americans. Commemoration of John Brown as controversial therefore suggests that contemporary Americans remain divided on how to interpret the American Civil War era. Even though Brown may personify the reconciliation of racial division, the project to reconcile northerners and southerners necessitates that he is un-remembered as controversial.

Preface

So why does a Pakistani write about John Brown? I came to United States from Pakistan at the age of thirteen, and upon my arrival I lived in my imaginary world- the world of an unsullied immigrant. Nothing seemed to bother me. I never uttered the word 'homesick', and quickly started to think of this new setting as my home. On immigration papers, I am still a visitor to this country. But at heart, I converted to America upon landing at Dulles International Airport on October 3rd, 2003. At school, I started to read about American history as my history.

My connection with American history emerged in those classes. Even though I did not turn into a sage of American history, I nonetheless developed an interest in American history that gives meaning to my personal narrative as an American immigrant. While reading the Federalist and Anti-Federalist papers for instance, I would imagine sitting alongside the founding fathers and arguing with them. The history of the American Civil War however caught my attention the most because memories of that past were embedded across various physical sites in my new surroundings.

Washington-Lee, the high school I attended upon arriving in America, is named in memory of Robert E. Lee, the most famous general of the Confederate army and President Washington. The high school I loved to compete against in our tennis matches was named in memory of J.E.B Stuart, the man who entered the Engine House with United States Marines at Harpers Ferry and captured John Brown. Sometimes, I would shop at the local Sports Authority located adjacent to a highway named after Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy during the Civil War. I would overhear my fellow students mocking Robert E. Lee High School, questioning how someone could

attend a school named in memory of a Confederate. May be they didn't realize that our school also half saluted Robert E. Lee. But such informal statements revealed that even though the Civil War ended more than a century and a half ago it continues to spark arousing reactions. In this Honors Thesis, I explore one crucial event that occurred a year before the official start of the American Civil War: John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry.

During high school, I remember reading about the American Civil War for a couple of weeks and participating in a Civil War presentation organized by the Social Studies Department but I did not come across the name 'John Brown' or 'Harpers Ferry'. Only later I found myself sitting on a train towards Chicago that stopped for ten seconds at Harpers Ferry and thus later came to know about John Brown and his influential role in the American Civil War history. This thesis attempts to connect my academic training at Macalester College in the fields of Anthropology and Religious Studies with my experiences of inheriting American history during high school. Perhaps this paper, more than anything else, signifies nostalgia of my high school days.

Through this paper, I reignite my interest in American history and explore questions that I was not trained well enough to ask as a teenager. I consider this piece of scholarship as a gift to my social studies teachers. They encouraged me to explore the American past and make that past meaningful in my present-day life. I return to them a piece of scholarship that reveals how memory reshapes that past and conforms the past to the needs of the present-day society. More than anything else, I hope this paper inspires a young American teenager to gain interest in American history and appreciate how the construction of memory shapes the way we understand the past.

Chapter 1

John Brown and the American Civil Religion

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In *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, Bellah states "Americans have interpreted their history as having religious meaning" (Bellah, 1992: 2). Religious discourse gives meaning to the construction of American identity, but in doing so, the religious language displaces from a religious context. The notion of the "Chosen People" comes from the Jewish context where the Torah is supposed to signify God's covenant with the people of Israel. In American, Bellah argues, this exact idea of the "Chosen People" signifies God's covenant with America with all American citizens regardless of their religious background. While religious traditions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism and the rest differentiate Americans, the institutionalized civil religion attempts to unify Americans of various religious backgrounds and creed in upholding and consecrating their shared American identity. Like the children of Israel, Americans bind a covenant with their national identity.

The American Civil Religion therefore is a religion that mobilizes a national identity. The notion of a Civil Religion informs Bellah's exploration of the common set of moral understandings that legitimize the coherency and unity of the broad category of American society. This tenet is operationalized through various public rituals that sanctify America. Common examples of such rituals include the invocation of the phrase "God Bless America" at the conclusion of a political speech and the "Pledge of

Allegiance" that is supposed to be recited by school students while standing upright and facing the American flag. In addition, the American Civil Religion ethos permeates in many songs about American history.

For instance, *The New Colossus*, a sonnet by Emma Lazarus, affirms the covenant of newly arrived immigrants to American. The song goes as follows, "Send these, the homeless tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the Golden Door". The above stanza portrays America as a door to heaven that welcomes millions of immigrants landing at Coney Island. As is the case with other manifestations of the American Civil Religion, a religious language and metaphor gives meaning to the construction of a collective, shared American identity. Lazarus' song points to the collective American identity of newly arrived immigrants. Perhaps the most intriguing manifestation of the American Civil Religion emerges in the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

> Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
> He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
> He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
> His truth is marching on.

Those initial lines of the song allude to the Book of Isaiah and the Book of Revelation in depicting the image of Lord crushing a wine press with his "Terrible Swift Sword". But the song is not primarily concerned with these biblical texts. Instead, it concerns with igniting a patriotic fervor in celebrating the unification of the country after the hard fought Civil War. The chorus line "Glory, Glory Hallelujah" signals the covenant between God and Americans, a covenant that persists against the threat the secession. The song therefore retains its relevance today as it was notably played at the Washington National Cathedral and St. Paul's Cathedral in memory of the victims of

attack on World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The song captures the idea that America remains a united nation regardless of any attack on America. Ironically, the song is a reworded version of *John Brown's Body* dedicated to John Brown who had raided the town of Harpers Ferry merely a year before the Civil War to liberate slaves. Unlike the Battle Hymn of the Republic, this original version of the song proclaims John Brown's martyrdom with phrases such as, "John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave, His soul's marching on." Who is John Brown and why must we think about his memory in understanding the dynamics of the American Civil Religion.

Religious versus Non-Religious Logic: the Story of Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry

The legal abolishment of slavery was the end product of the American Civil War. But barely a year before the start of this war, John Brown fought his own war against slavery. On October 16th 1859, Brown recruited eighteen men and identified them as members of his provisional army ready to wage a war against slavery. He named them his "provisional army" because he envisioned this band of soldiers to create a new nation state. Otherwise, the provisional army w sot composed of soldiers or military personnel. They were just a group of thirteen white and five black men who acquiesced to Brown's plan to raid Harpers Ferry. Brown had specifically planned an attack the national armory located at Harpers Ferry and distribute the stolen weapons to slaves all across the Deep South. He saw religious significance in the mountains and hills surrounding Harpers

Ferry, claiming that "God has given the strength of the hills to freedom; they were placed here for the emancipation of the Negro race" (Warren, 1993: 52). Frederick Douglass, on the other hand, dismissed the religious logic of Brown. He warned "the place is a steel-trap; you'll be surrounded and cut off and taken" (Warren, 1993: 329). Douglass proved correct. Brown and his men resorted to the Engine House where they hid from the residents of Harpers Ferry who took to streets to express their anger against his raid. The United States Marines under the command of Robert E. Lee however barricaded the Engine House and within a few minutes captured Brown. A trial ensued in nearby Charlestown where Brown's own defense team asked for pardon based on an argument of mental illness and insanity. Brown however distanced himself from his defense team and defended his actions as completely sane. He argued that the Bible commanded him to start his crusade against the institution of slavery and pointed to the presence of insanity in those around him who obey the laws of the country that legitimizes slavery (McGinty, 2009: 287). The theme of Brown's religious logic and the response to his religious logic as irrational and insane reappears throughout the story of Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry. These conflicting logics inform the reactions to Brown's raid from the larger public once Brown was hanged in December 1859 for committing treason against the state of Virginia.

Newspapers such as the *Richmond Dispatch* in the South referred to Brown as a criminal. In contrast, many Northerners received his dead body as a martyr's relic. A transcendentalist named Henry Thoreau doubted if a prolonged life "can do as much good as his (Brown's) death" (Peterson, 2004: 21). Fellow poet and leader of the transcendentalist movement, Ralph Waldo Emerson, evoked the image of Jesus'

crucifixion in his reaction to Brown's hanging at Charleston with the following words, "John Brown's martyrdom if it shall be perfected will make the gallows as glorious as the cross" (Atkinson, 2000: 13). Unlike Thoreau and Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who is best known for his novel on witchcraft *The Scarlet Letter,* argued, "Nobody was ever more justly hanged" than John Brown because Brown "was a blood stained fanatic" whose "raid was a preposterous miscalculation of possibilities" (Meltzer, 2006: 17). On one hand, Lincoln during the Civil War invokes God to call upon his fellow citizens to defend their nation and prays that the better angels of the nation will prevail against the threat of secession. Brown, on the other hand, showed no faith in the American Constitution to liberate slaves. He envisioned creating an alternative nation where slaves would live freely and sought to realize the anti-slavery commandments of his Bible by raiding the national armory of the United States at Harpers Ferry.

Commemorating Brown at National Historic Park

In this Honors Thesis, I examine the theory of the American Civil Religion by studying the way John Brown is remembered at present-day Harpers Ferry. I do so because John Brown's raid does not fit well with the logic of the American Civil Religion. The American Civil Religion thesis explains how a unified American identity is made meaningful and as witnessed in the Battle Hymn of the Republic, it quite often manifests in commemoration of the American Civil War. The example of John Brown's raid on the other hand represented an attack on America and a distrust of the American constitution. To explore how John Brown's memory situates in the American Civil

Religion framework, I travelled to Harpers Ferry and conducted ethnography of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park because unlike Civil War battlefields such as Gettysburg, the National Historic Park not only commemorates the Civil War skirmishes at Harpers Ferry between 1861-1863 but also burdens with retelling John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry in 1859.

The Harpers Ferry National Historic Park memorializes John Brown as controversial in order to maintain a neutral stance. Remembering Brown as controversial represents a historicized memory that subordinates Brown within the larger narrative of the American Civil War but in doing so it 'un-remembers' him and fails to define him either as a martyr or a terrorist. The Park welcomes Americans from all over the country to celebrate a shared heritage of the American Civil War era but maintains a neutral stance in retelling John Brown's raid because the Park fears that the contentious memories of Brown during the time of his raid linger amongst contemporary Americans. Commemoration of John Brown as controversial therefore suggests that contemporary Americans remain divided on how to interpret the American Civil War era. In this Honors Thesis, I therefore argue that the rhetoric of neutrality attempts to address the logic of the American Civil Religion but in so doing also reveals Bellah's concern of the broken convent and the unfulfilled promise of unified American identity.

In many ways, this Honors Thesis highlights the irony in the story of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. It used to be a song sung by soldiers marching down south at a time when America was torn apart between a Union and a Confederate government. Back then in the midst of the Civil War, the song had proclaimed John Brown a martyr whose "soul keeps marching on". But in the evolution of the song from *John Brown's Body* to

the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, the song forgets John Brown and instead sanctifies a unified American identity. Similarly, in this Honors Thesis I examine how John Brown is un-remembered through the lexicon of controversy in order to mobilize a collective American identity at Harpers Ferry National Historic Park. In what follows, I examine literature on the dialectics of remembering and forgetting and how this dialectics manifests in the construction of national identity.

Forgetting and Constructing National Identity

In his book *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs theorizes the notion of memory and attempts to explain not only how memory informs the collective identity and solidarity but also how the absence of memory or misremembering informs the disintegration of societies. He states the past itself constantly ceases to exist but precisely because it no longer exists to tell its story, contemporary commemorators reconstruct the past. In *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton further expands Halbwachs thesis by revealing the role of rituals in sustaining and recreating the memories of the past. He argues that images from the past legitimize the social order of the present world but further notes that "the past and recollected knowledge of the past, are conveyed and sustained by performances" (Connerton, 1989: 4). When members of the present world seek to distance from the social order and hierarchy of the past world, they conceive and articulate the new society ironically in acts of recollection of the past.

The notion of collective memory espoused by Halbwachs and further elaborated by Connerton explores the creation and sustenance of shared memory within a particular

society and how these memories of the past are conveyed through performances and rituals at specific sites of memory. This phenomenon of social/ collective memory differs from Freudian psychoanalysis that addresses the repressed memories unique to individuals. Both of these trajectories of scholarship in memory studies, Freud's and Halbwachs', emerged during the late ninetieth to mid-twentieth centuries when memory was demanded to offset the constant change and temporality created by the technological boom. I, however, base my analysis of John Brown and the American Civil Religion through employing the notion of social/collective memory because my unit of analysis in this paper, the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, represents a transformed cultural landscape that shapes the reconstruction of Brown's raid for the purpose of institutionalizing a shared memory of Brown as controversial. 'Controversy' in this case exemplifies the concern amongst many scholars that memory quite often forgets.

Connerton argues that modern way western cultures face a contradiction between remembering and forgetting. "The frequent discussion of and apparent high value ascribed to memory in recent years" (Connerton, 2009: 1) have led to certain "types of structural forgetting which are specific to the culture of modernity" (Connerton, 2009: 2). Frederick Jameson fears that contemporary social system has failed to retain its own past (Jameson, 1985: 125). Eric Hobsbawn argues that the "eerie phenomenon of the late twentieth century" to connect with earlier generations inhibits young men and women to have any sort of "organic relation to the public past of the times they live in" (Hobsbawn, 1994: 3). Jacques Le Goff in *History and Memory* ties Hobsbawn notion of a "destruction of the past" (Hobsbawn, 1994:3) to modernity's awkward taste for the fashions of earlier times. "Memory has thus become a best-seller in a consumer society" (Le Goff, 1992:

162) because consumers obsessively fear "losing its memory in a kind of collective amnesia" (Le Goff, 1992: 162). These arguments signify a dialectics of remembering and forgetting that Andrea Huyssen best encapsulates in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* as he states, "The undisputed waning of history and historical consciousness, the lament about political, social, cultural amnesia, about *posthistoire* have been accompanied in the past decade and a half by a memory boom" (Huyssen, 1995: 5). Connerton finds a gap in scholarship on memory and forgetting, arguing that "the subject of how modernity forgets has not so far been subject to systematic scrutiny" (Connerton, 2009: 4). He addresses this question by echoing Nora's *lieux de memoire* as he argues that memory is produced and sustained in a definable locus "such as a house, arch, corner, column, or intercolumnar space" (Connerton, 2009: 5). This 'art of memory' (the notion that memory depends on a certain topography), Connerton argues, differs from a major source of forgetting "associate with processes that separate social life from locality and human dimensions". In this Honors Thesis, I explore how forgetting might not necessarily require the absence of place and separation of life with locality but rather emerge in a context where the locality, the *lieux de memoire*, is reinvented.

The National Historic Park does not abolish the space of Harpers Ferry or discourages the visitors to engage with the physical locality of Harpers Ferry. Quite to the opposite, the Park prides itself in restoring the physical location where historical events transpired. The inception of the National Historic Park represents a transformation in the physical locality of Harpers Ferry and this reinvention of Harpers Ferry was followed by addition and subtraction, fixation and alteration of places of memory within the overarching place called Harpers Ferry. The 'art of memory' manifested at Harpers Ferry

National Historic Park reflects the dialectics of remembering and forgetting as it un-remembers John Brown by memorializing him as controversial.

Memorializing John Brown as controversial is necessitated due to the National Historic Park aim to welcome visitors from all over the country to visit the Park and relive the past. The reconstructed memory of the Civil War battles at Harpers Ferry and John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry therefore seeks to mobilize and cultivate a sense of shared American identity. The dialectics of remembering and forgetting thus plays a vital role in projects of nationalism and identity formation.

Scholars of nation-state formation such as Ernest Renan (Renan, 1882) argue that forgetting plays a crucial role in unifying disparate ethnic groups towards proclaiming their shared national identity. Renan points out that violence upon certain groups of people preceded the political formation of the nation. Although the unification of disparate groups of people is "effected by means of brutality", the history of that violence is nonetheless silenced in order to enable these various groups to recognize their shared national identity. The nation, in Renan's words, represents a "large-scale solidarity constituted by feelings of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and that one is prepared to make in the future" (Renan, 1882: 20). The role of forgetting in order to mobilize a national identity is manifested in the movement to preserve Civil War battlefields in mid-twentieth century that resulted in the inception of federal institutions such as the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park. Another scholar of nation-state identity, Benedict Anderson, affirms Renan's argument as he devotes an entire chapter in his book *Imagined Communities* to the ironic phenomena of forgetting in memory. He mentions the American Civil War specifically, arguing that Americans "remember/forget the

hostilities between 1861 and 1865 as a great 'civil' war between 'brothers' rather than between- as they briefly were- two sovereign nation-states" (Anderson, 2006: 201). David Blight in *Race and Reunion* shares Anderson's assessment. Blight notes that the end of the Civil War led to many more decades of reconstruction. But once the dust was settled, Americans were faced with question of how to move forward as one nation (Blight, 2001). The challenge of twentieth century America was "how to square black freedom and the stirrings of racial equality with a cause (the South's) that had lost almost everything expect its unbroken belief in white supremacy" (Blight, 2001: 31). On one hand lay the need to connect with southerners who continued to feel the pain of defeat during the Civil War. On the other hand lay the need to realize the promise for racial justice that the Emancipation Proclamation could not achieve on its own. Blight argues that in response to this conundrum, reconciliation took precedence over concerns for racial justice.

Ironically, the Civil War represented a crusade-like battle between two foes; each believing God to be on their side while the devil was on the others'. They heralded fallen soldiers as martyrs and in doing so signify that the American Civil War was more than just a war of guns and barrels and differing political goals but instead a moral war whose narrative was shaped by heightened religious fervor (Stout, 2007: xi). Stout recognizes that the political and economic dimension of the war. He points out that the war was President Lincoln's attempt to restore the Union and free the slaves in order to achieve this political goal. He also does not ignore the growth of industry and the transformation of the mode of production from slave labor to wage labor that came about with Confederate defeat and the migration of many ex-slaves to urban cities such as Chicago

and New York. However in this book, he wants to highlight how religion produced the divide between the North and South and how much of that religious discourse seems to be forgotten in the process of reconciling the differences between the North and South.

The commemoration of the Civil War silenced the religious discourses that shaped the violence of the Civil War. This silencing of the religious violence sought to define the Civil War as a shared cultural heritage of Southerners and Northerners and it did so through a preservation of Civil War battlefields such as Gettysburg, Williamsburg, Antietam, and indeed Harpers Ferry. At such sites, commemoration of the Civil War elevated patriotism to a point where "Patriotism itself became sacralized to the point that it enjoyed coequal or even superior status to conventional denominational faiths" (Stout, 2007: xvii). Civil War battlefields thus signify an art of memory that strives to reconcile North and South and pacify the trauma of the Civil War that resulted in such deep distrust and anger from the southerners towards the northerners. The battlefields attempt to materialize the vision that northerners and southerners would forget the acrimonious legacy of the Civil War and identify with each other as Americans upon performing the ritual of visiting the battlefields. Civil War battlefields thus represent spaces where the American Civil Religion ethos permeates. In order to relate John Brown and the American Civil Religion thesis, I chose to study the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park.

The Historic Park is not technically a Civil War battlefield but instead comes under the category of Historic Parks, many of which have no association with the Civil War. I nonetheless associate Harpers Ferry National Historic Pak with other Civil War battlefields because they emerged during the same historical context; a time period when

a nation-wide preservation movement sought to restore spaces deemed significant to the Civil War and commemorate the Civil War in order to ignite the necessary patriotic fervor contemporary American in preparation of World War II.

Methodology

My study of the National Historic Park incorporates ethnographic data, participant observation and library research to assess how the Park commemorates John Brown and the significance behind such commemoration. I spent an entire summer in Virginia and travelled to Harpers Ferry on numerous occasions to interview the employees of the National Historic Park. Most of my interviews were an hour long, but in some cases they lasted for an additional fifteen minutes. In total, I was able to reach four employees of the Park amongst whom I was able to conduct extensive interviews with three. Two of these three informants work under the Interpretation Division of the Historic Park while the other attends to the Cultural and Natural Resource Management Division of the Park. In addition, I also interviewed an independent tour guide at Harpers Ferry and the comparison of my ethnographic data collected from that interview with my other informants enables me to argue that the transformation of the site into a tourist attraction shapes the commemoration of Brown as controversial. In my analysis of how memory as controversy is produced and presented to the visitors of the Park, I mainly explore the experience of the youth visitors to the Park for two reasons. First of all, the National Park intentionally attends more to the youth than the adults in order to make the space of Harpers Ferry function as a 3-dimensional classroom and play its role in teaching

American History to the young generation. My informants are saddened by the lack of time that teachers spend on American history due to the demands of the state curriculum to spend more time on improving student grades in Math and Science. As a classroom outside a usual classroom, the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park seeks to fill the void left by the schools. I compare the commemoration of Brown at the Historic Park with textbook representations of Brown across various public education systems that leads me to the second reason behind my focus on the youth. Unlike the adults, the youngsters visit the Park without much prior knowledge of John Brown because John Brown is barely mentioned in most U.S History textbooks. Therefore the retelling of Brown's raid at the National Historic Park reflects an institutionalized memory of Brown that the Park attempts to inculcate amongst the youth. My informant suggest that the contentious memories of Brown continue to linger amongst the present-day audience and that is why they fail to define Brown at Harpers Ferry. But examining the youth reveals that the notion of a controversy does not only reflect Brown's legacy in general but in fact emerges out of a concerted effort by the Park to interpret the raid as a complicated event in American history.

What Lies Ahead

The next chapter contextualizes the history of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park. In particular, I historicize the legislative efforts behind establishing the National Historic Park by relating it to a broader national preservation movement of preserving Civil War battlefields. I argue that like other Civil War battlefields such as Gettysburg

and Williamsburg, the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park preserves the landscape and resists change in order to make the visitors feel as if they are living through the Civil War era. But reliving the past through this rhetoric of preservation distorts that past. Such a reconstruction of the past paints a mythic image of the past to foster a patriotic spirit amongst Americans and defines the Civil War as a shared cultural heritage through the rituals of visiting battlefields such as Harpers Ferry.

Chapter 3 directs the readers towards the processes by which John Brown's commemoration as controversial manifest. In particular, I explain at length my analysis of the Park's interaction with the youth. I compare the Park's education with the representation of John Brown in U.S history textbooks that the youth read in their usual classroom setting. I detail my participant observation of the National Leadership Youth Council and its recreation of John Brown's raid and the short films produced on John Brown produced by Harpers Ferry middle school students. In each case, I highlight how the Park fosters a historicized memory of John Brown to fulfill its neutral stance on John Brown.

In Chapter 4, I deconstruct the notion of neutrality. I argue that neutrality does not reflect a purely objective or disconcerted stance on John Brown. Instead the stance of neutrality derives from a form of interpretation that aims to present the various viewpoints on John Brown from the 1860's and give leverage to the visitors on how to remember John Brown. The strategy of neutrality therefore aims to find a place of remembering John Brown in an environment where Americans from all corners of the country assemble but the memory of Brown as a controversy is a memory that fails to

define him. In such un-remembering, the Park confesses its fear that the divisive ethos of the Civil War era may continue to sustain even a century and a half later.

Chapter 5 concludes my thesis and highlights how remembering Brown as a controversy extend the narrative of Brown's life into the narrative of the American Civil War. What if there had been no Civil War after Brown's raid? I explore this question at in the conclusion. I end this paper with a brief section on how the ideas I develop in this paper contribute to a conversation amongst religious studies on how the secular nation-state defines religion.

Chapter 2
Dialectics of Remembering and Forgetting: The Inception of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park

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"For preservationists, the historic structure must be interpreted accurately and in a context free of contaminating purposes or self-serving interpretations"- so argues Diane Barthel in her comparative study of preservation movements in Great Britain and United States titled *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (Barthel, 1996: 7). She stresses the concern over authenticity that haunts preservationists as they present a particular space to common visitors who "visits historic sites to see the evidence, to get in touch with history" (Barthel, 1996: 7). The preservationists therefore strive to maintain the uncontaminated structure and ethos of the space. Barthel however acutely points out that although "the public implicitly accepts what it sees as the real thing" (Barthel, 1996: 7) authenticity is an elusive goal. In this chapter, I attend to the preservation of Harpers Ferry that emerged with the inception of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park to explore how the mantra of authenticity also sings in this example but as with the preservation of other civil war battlefields, the past is not preserved. I argue that the National Historic Park attempts to relive the time period when Harpers Ferry became a strategic location of Civil War skirmishes. The preservation of the town however distorts the past and instead recreates the space of Harpers Ferry as a

site of tourist attraction where Americans from all over the country visit to remember the Civil War period as a shared past and cultural heritage.

In what follows, I present a brief history of Harpers Ferry and then I contextualize the legislative effort behind the establishment of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park. I finally highlight specific structures, or what Halbwachs would term armatures of memory, whose reconstruction, relocation and absence at Harpers Ferry embed them with memory of John Brown as controversy. Throughout this chapter, I defend my claim that the Historic Park fosters the American Civil Religion ethos but doing so also necessitates a reconstruction of the past that ironically emerges through the rhetoric of preservation.

Residents flee. Town ceases to be

During my first interview with the Chief Historian and Interpreter of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, my informant argued that Harpers Ferry stands apart from other Civil War battlefields such as Gettysburg. Unlike Gettysburg that is only known for three days of war, Harpers Ferry has a far richer history. The area presently called Harpers Ferry used to be inhabited by American Indians on a seasonal basis. In 1733, Lord Fairfax allowed Peter Stevens to establish a ferry crossing. Stevens sold his log cabin to Robert Harper, an architect and millwright from Philadelphia. Despite his wife's pleas to return to Philadelphia, Robert Harper decided to build a mill and create the infrastructure that would later transform this space intercepted by the Potomac and the Shenandoah from an untamed wilderness termed "The Hole" to a crucial point of transportation, industry, and a storehouse belonging to the American government.

Following the War of Independence of 1789, the nascent government of the United States sought to produce weaponry to offset the potential threat posed by France and Canada. In 1794, Congress passed a bill that called for establishment of armories for the manufacture and storage of arms. French engineer Etienne Rochfontaine expressed concern over the plan to build the armory at Harpers Ferry, citing the lack of convenient ground for arms manufacturing and the tendency for the area to flood. President Washington however remained heedless to his reservations and Congress subsequently appropriated funds to build an armory at Harpers Ferry in 1798.

In 1860, John Brown attacked this armory to start a slave revolt raid and liberate the slaves across the Deep South. Although his raid failed because his vision did not materialize, the news of the raid spread across the country and exposed the deep divide across the country on whether slavery ought to be legal in the United States. A few years later, Harpers Ferry once again became a venue of hostility A few years later Harpers Ferry seesawed between the occupation by Union troops and Confederate troops during the Civil War. After the Civil War, the residents of Harpers Ferry had to cope with all the destruction caused by the war, an experience akin to that of most Americans in the Reconstruction era. One such resident, Joseph Barry wrote *The Strange Story of Harper's Ferry: With Legends Surrounding the Town* recounting his experience of living at Harpers Ferry for more than sixty years during which he witnessed the industrial boom, John Brown's raid, the civil war years and its aftermath.

Barry launches his memoir by highlighting the mass exodus of residents of Harpers Ferry after the Civil War. Harpers Ferry was home to around three thousand residents prior to the Civil War but "at the breaking out of hostilities nearly all the inhabitants left their homes" (Barry, 1903: 5). While some migrated down south and

joined the confederate band, others allied with the Union faction. Regardless of the political faction with whom the residents of Harpers Ferry allied, the Civil War caused a lasting damage to the residential life at Harpers Ferry. The hustle and bustle of Harpers Ferry that had emerged during the industrial boom withered away. Between Brown's raid in 1859 and the creation of the Historic Park in 1944, Harpers Ferry underwent a catastrophic period of neglect, devastating floods and economic decline that obliterated the town (Shackel, 2008: foreword). The memory of the past however was not left in ruins.

In 1944, the Interior Department of the United States government established a Historic Park that would retell the history of Harpers Ferry to visitors across American and in doing so revitalize the town. However the past that this newly established institution sought to retell was left shattered by the devastation following the Civil War. Therefore the space of Harpers Ferry was "restored and refurnished in keeping with an image of the past deemed appropriate by those doing the restoring" (Shackel, 2008: ix). Through federal funds, the United States department of Interior tasked the Harpers Ferry National Monument, later expanded into the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, to restore Harpers Ferry and construe its historical significance.

New Boys in Town

The inception of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park occurred during the Franklin Roosevelt administration. An earlier bill named *The Antiquities Act of 1906* enabled the president of the United States to establish national monuments on federal lands. President Roosevelt signed an executive order to transfer the War Department's

parks and monuments to the National Parks Service, thereby making this new federal agency "the custodian of all legally designated historic and archeological monuments of the federal government" (Shackel, 2008: 27). The project to build a monument at Harpers Ferry was led by a congressman named Randolph Jennings, a New Deal Democrat who represented the second district of West Virginia (p. 36); Henry McDonald, the president of Storer College which was established at Harpers Ferry after the Civil War as the first college in America to accept black students; and Mary V. Mish, then president of the Washington County Historical Society (Shackel, 2008: 41).

Randolph Jennings recognized the crucial role played by John Brown's raid in shaping the history of Harpers Ferry as he introduced a bill in Congress to establish Harpers Ferry National Military Park in the area where the raid took place (Shackel, 2008:36). The approval of a Historic Site at Harpers Ferry by the Department of the Interior however was contingent upon donation of land (p. 37). Congressman Randolph consequently proposed another bill to establish Harpers Ferry as a National Historic Park that would consist solely of donated lands. But he faced further obstacles as the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Harold Ickes, objected to the bill because it simply duplicated the Historic Sites Act. A newer version of the bill authorized the Secretary of the Interior to sustain existing structures or build newer buildings to preserve "relics and records" that pertains to historical events at Harpers Ferry (p. 39). With these newer provisions in order, Congress passed the bill on June 30, 1944 and President Roosevelt signed it into law. With the hurdle of congressional approval behind it, Henry McDonald (the president of Storer College) still needed to search for funding for the Historic Monument (Shackel, 2008: 39).

McDonald luckily found help from Mary V. Mish who utilized her reputation as "an antiquary with a missionary's zeal" (Shackel, 2008: 39), to propel the members of the Washington County Historical Society to support the Harpers Ferry Monument. In 1963, the Harpers Ferry monument expanded into the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park[1] once it gained possession of Maryland Heights where significant skirmishes occurred during the Civil War years. With this change in status, the restored Harpers Ferry The context in which Harpers Ferry became Harpers Ferry National Historic Park suggests that the retelling of the past sought to transform Harpers Ferry into a tourists attraction by commemorating the Civil War past as a shared cultural heritage of all Americans.

A Reconstructed Past, a Patriotic Past: Remembering Civil War

Even though the history of Harpers Ferry transcends the couple of years of Civil War battles, the retelling of Harpers Ferry's history is centered around the 1860 era precisely in order to define the historically significant status of the town based on its Civil War past. During its survey of potential historic sites that deserved to be restored and commemorated, the National Park Services followed the suggestion of Verne E. Charletain (the first chief historian in the Branch of Historic Sites) that historic sites with a military theme would be the most appropriate. Even though the Congressional Committee on Public Lands and the Bureau of the Budget questioned the notion that the historical interest of Harpers Ferry derives only from the years of Civil War, the acting Secretary of the Interior responded by linking the significance of Harpers Ferry with the Civil War (Shackel, 2000: 36).

[1] Identifying a place as a National Historic Park signifies the highest designation of historic significance.

The National Historic Park therefore paid attention to the "great men" of the Civil War era and the "heroics of the war overshadow a very different form of heroics" such as the narrative of the residents of Harpers Ferry. Shackel argues that "one of the stories of Harpers Ferry's heroic past is the courage and persistence of its residents in rebuilding their homes and in making the Victorian town a thriving community" but this story he argues is "overlooked in favor of other war-related activities" (Shackel, 2000: preface). The Park's collection of artifacts therefore abided by the interpretive model of the Park that sought to retell the history of Harpers Ferry with a clear emphasis on the civil war history over other histories of Harpers Ferry.

The restriction on the scope of collection to abide by the interpretive model often created resentment amongst the residents of Harpers Ferry. Many residents of Harpers Ferry were unwilling to sell their decades old properties to the federal government, fearing the memories embedded in these objects would be lost if it conflicted with the interpretive model of the Historic Park (Shackel, 2008: 58). They reacted to the Historic Park as an intrusion upon their daily life by the federal government. The registration of Bradley Nash Farm exemplifies the Park's scope of collection restricted to Civil War significance.

Located in the northwest corner of Harpers Ferry, the farm is named in memory of Bradley Nash who promoted the town's history and advocated the National Historic Park as the town's mayor between 1971-1977 and 1981-1986. The registration form of historic places describes the farm as a "grassy hill overlooking the Potomac River" and graced with fruit trees and flowerbeds. But the Bradley Farm does not gain its significance due to its natural landscape. Instead, the significance of the Bradley Farm derives due to its relevance in the Civil War era. In the section of the registration form

that underlines statement of significance, the Bradley Farm meets criterion A which states as follows: “Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history”. The Historic Park specifically highlights “Community Planning and Development” and “Military” as the two central aspects of Bradley Farm’s significance. The statement of significance associates the Bradley Nash Farm with the Siege of Harpers Ferry in 1862, Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s capture of the town. The significance of the Farm further extends from the 1860’s to the 1970’s due to Mayor Bradley Nash’s close connection to Congressman Jennings Randolph that proved pivotal in the continued congressional support of the National Historic Park. The Bradley Nash Farm exemplifies the reconstruction of Harpers Ferry with the inception of the National Historic Park.

The Historic Park cannot preserve the past because the severe destruction during the Civil War and the floods after that left the town in a state of complete abyss. The inception of the Historic Park redefined Harpers Ferry. The inception of the Historic Park consequently transformed the town into a federal park and the decisions regarding how to restore and present the town to the visitors therefore became the prerogative of the Historic Park. It no longer remained a town lived in and remembered by the people residing at Harpers Ferry but rather became a site of tourist attraction where employees of the federal government tasked themselves to retell the story of Harpers Ferry that attracts Americans from all over to visit Harpers Ferry and collectively celebrate the shared past, i.e. the Civil War era. The time period of the Park’s establishment tells a lot about why the Park’s reconstruction of the past seeks to redefine the Civil War as a shared cultural heritage.

The legislative push to establish the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park derived out of a national preservation movement during World War II. As America became embroiled in World War II, the nation collectively demanded remembering a past that evoked patriotic sentiments of fallen soldiers who sacrificed their lives to ensure that the nation prevails against stern challenges. This national preservation movement ironically sought to restore and preserve Civil War battlefields. A rising number of tourists started to visit sites of Civil War significance to connect with the past and continually remind themselves of their civic duties as Americans. The preservation of such sites therefore derived out of a nationalist fervor that sought to preserve a "tangible past" and provide a "coherent cultural identity" (Shackel, 2008: 23).

Although places such as Gettysburg and Antietam came under the category of battlefields, Harpers Ferry was excluded from the thirty-four military parks proposed between 1901 and 1904. Harpers Ferry hence did not identify as a battlefield per se. Consequently the restoration and preservation of Harpers Ferry required the legislative process that resulted with the establishment of the Historic Park. Nonetheless, the restoration of Harpers Ferry more closely corresponds with the restoration of other civil war battlefields rather than with other Historic Parks. Regardless of whether one visited Colonial Williamsburg or Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, the act of visiting these places of Civil War significance became a ritual of "reconciliation between Northern and Southern veterans" (Shackel, 2008: 11).[2] The reconciliation projects manifests in various rituals performed at Harpers Ferry such as the artillery shots displayed to the visitors by the Park's *Living History* program.

[2] There are other National Historic Parks such as the San Antonio Missions that commemorates the Franciscans and Spanish missionaries from 1718. Harpers Ferry National Historic Park however more closely relates to other Civil War battlefields that may not be part of the National Park Services but nevertheless function as site of tourist attraction and commemorate the Civil War as a shared cultural heritage.

At the Civil War artillery exhibition, the Historic Park fires shots from a reproduced canon that resembles a canon from the Civil War era. It is one of the Park's most famous *Living History Programs* where the Park takes the visitors on a tour of the past and enables the visitor to feel as if they are living in this past. Such exhibits fail to present the past authentically because the past itself ceases to exist. These exhibits instead exemplify a past reconstructed to address the concerns of the present-day commemorators of the past. The Artillery exhibition does not evoke images of the bloodshed and destruction caused during the war. The exhibition does not suggest which side won the war, and which side lost; which side was morally justified to participate in the war and which side unjustly inflicted harm. Instead, artillery exhibitions define the Civil War as a shared cultural past. This ritual attempts to relive the Civil War but the past that is being relived does not highlight the rupture in the American collective identity that occurred during the Civil War. It rather mobilizes a unified American collectively. The visitors are encouraged to feel as if they are walking in the footsteps of the soldiers who participated in the Civil War but the soldiers are not specified as Union soldiers or Confederate Soldiers. Rather the act of engaging in the artillery exhibition seeks to evoke the memory of a generalized Civil War solider. Although the war itself represented the fracturing of the national collective unity, the ritual of the artillery exhibition becomes as "lasting memorials for both sides of the war" (Shackel, 2008: 112).

The inception of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park consequently signifies a transformation in the cultural landscape of Harpers Ferry that shapes the retelling of the town's history. As Shackel argues, "Just as our memories of the past are constructed, revisited, revised, changed, and constructed again, so too is our cultural landscape shaped and changed as we (or more accurately, the managers of historic places) rethink the past

based on ongoing research or interpretive need" (Shackel, 2008: ix-x). Like Williamsburg and Gettysburg, Harpers Ferry's transformation into a site of tourist attraction shapes its commemoration of the Civil War as a shared cultural heritage. However unlike the other sites of Civil War significance, Harpers Ferry is also burdened with retelling John Brown's raid that occurred a year before the official start of the Civil War. The last section of this chapter focuses on particular structures and physical objects at Harpers Ferry that manifest the reconstruction of the past with the inception of the Historic Park. Their various statuses as objects relocated, absent, and newly created embed them with memory of John Brown as controversy. Amongst all of them, the story of the Engine House where the U.S Marines thwarted Brown's raid remains the most fascinating one.

The Homeless Engine House

The Engine House where Brown surrendered symbolized the fight for racial equality for the post-Emancipation Proclamation generation that felt as alienated as their slave ancestors were from realizing social and economic opportunities. Although they were legally no longer considered slaves, they still lived under a repressive system. In 1905, a group of African-Americans under the auspices of W.E.B Dubois assembled to voice their concern for racial equality. Better known as members of the Niagara Movement, they started their movement in Niagara Falls because they were not allowed to rent a space to stay in Buffalo New York and they opted to end their movement at Harpers Ferry to remember John Brown's raid. They sanctified the Engine House as they "formed a single procession, removed their shoes and socks and walked barefoot as if treading on holy ground" (Shackel, 2008: 20). In addition, Shackel notes one African-

American author of a newspaper called *The Bee* who described the Engine House as a fort "where a heroic soul made a stand for liberty, not for himself primarily but for his brother in black" (Shackel, 2008:18). Although John Brown was not African-American, his actions during that raid made him a martyr figure for African-Americans. They proclaimed the Engine House as John Brown's fort and defined this object as a site of pilgrimage. However during the years preceding the Niagara Movement, the Engine House struggled to cement its significance at Harpers Ferry even as it struggled in a constant displacement as an object of possession.

Out of all the government buildings in the armory enclosure, the armory remained the only one that escaped destruction during the Civil War (Barry, 1905: 142) but the armory failed to cement its place in Harpers Ferry. The townspeople of Harpers Ferry in the early twentieth century were irritated by the influx of African-Americans who stayed at Storer College during their visits to Harpers Ferry and the Engine House. They were pleased when an industrialist, Thomas Savery, purchased much of the land on which the former Armory and Engine House stood. An object that would later be sanctified by the Niagara Movement had then become the possession of an industrialist. The significance of the Engine House would further diminish when Savery sold the Fort because it stood in the way of B and O railroad projects; consequently, the fort was moved about 250 foot west. The John Brown Fort Company purchased the fort in order to display it at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Unlike the African-Americans who would travel in groups to Harpers Ferry and pay homage to the Engine House, only eleven people paid a visit to the Engine House during its status as a museum object (Shackel, 2008: 19). It would take a reporter from Washington D.C named Mary Field to rescue the Fort and resituate it the area surrounding Harpers Ferry. She contacted a local farmer named

Alexander Murphy who agreed to allocate five acres of his farm and place the Fort there. Only upon this relocation did the Fort regain its attraction amongst visitors such as the members of the Niagara Movement. However the Fort once again crumpled in 1910 and was later rebuilt near the Storer College. The constant relocation of the John Brown Fort signifies the problem of commemorating John Brown at Harpers Ferry.

The preservation of Harpers Ferry strives to evoke images of the Civil War era as a shared cultural past of all Americans but the image of the Engine House complicates this redefined image of the Civil War era. The members of the Niagara Movement considered the Fort a site of pilgrimage but many others such as those who were glad with the dislocation of the Fort imparted no sacred meaning to it. Today the Fort stands adjacent to Shenandoah Street, around fifty yards away from its original location. The Park presents the Fort more as a hallowed ground than a hallowed ground. The gates of the fort remain open throughout the day for the visitor to enter. But the inside of the Fort underwhelms the visitor. Upon entering the Fort, I saw nothing that could gain my attention and enable me to interact in this space. The space was quite empty. All I could ask was, “Is this it?” The emptiness of the Fort and the lack of interaction between the visitor and the Fort embed the Fort with a memory of Brown as controversial. He remains indefinable since the Fort fails to induce the visitor to think of Brown in one way or another. Although I did not have the opportunity to interview visitors and ask them how they felt going inside the Fort, I did notice that I was one of a rare one who actually ventured inside the Fort. Most visitors whom I witnessed took pictures with the Fort in the background. Therefore if anything, the emptiness propels the visitor to forget the significance of this structure. To how many visitors the Fort remains a site of pilgrimage, to how many it evokes image of unnecessary violence and insanity, and to how many it

remains simply a background image in their touristic photographs remains a question unanswered. Nevertheless, the preservation of this structure by the National Historic Park inhibits the structure from embedding memories of Brown that in anyway define Brown as one thing or another. Rather the emptiness invites visitors to make their own assessment of Brown. It signifies the lack of interpretation of Brown. From highlighting a structure whose story is a story of displacement and presently emptiness, I move on to discuss another structure that did not exist during Brown's raid but was rather produced anew upon the inception of the Historic Park: the John Brown Museum located on the other end of Shenandoah Street.

The John Brown Museum

The John Brown Museum is structured in a way that enables the Historic Park to narrate and contextualize the life of John Brown. The museum highlights the concerns and issues of that era which prompted Brown to take action at Harpers Ferry. The museum openly collects anything that somehow relates to Brown's raid including souvenirs that emerged directly after the raid. The scope of collection of the Park gives leverage to collect any and everything related to Brown's raid but then to contextualize these artifacts and items, and present them in a manner that makes them meaningful to visitors. The museum is divided into three floors. Each floor has a video that narrates a particular section of the raid, thus each floor focuses on a particular moment of the raid. The video in the first room narrates the story of the raid. Before the start of the video, the lights dim. A number of mannequins that represent various characters of the raid stand on a small stage while a background voice narrates the story of the raid with supplementing

background voices of characters involved in the raid. In addition to background voice, there is also background noise such as the noise of a train evoking the image of the train that derailed the Brown's raid and which later took news of it to the authorities. The second room explores events leading up to the raid, Brown's life and the issue of slavery. The third room delves into the aftermath of the raid.

One of my informant works at one of the offices on top floor of the museum. As a Natural and Cultural Resource Manager of the Park, her work mainly involves presenting artifacts collected by the Park to the visitors and storing the history and background of all the artifacts in the Park's archival collection. She considers the third room her favorite section of John Brown's museum because it presents the disparate voices of the time, including the abolitionists as well as the folks who supported slavery. These contentious viewpoints are assembled and situated in a conversation through the use of technology. An interactive touch screen enables the visitors to listen to the various voices of the past and listen to them in whichever order they wish. According to my informant, once the visitors engage with the interactive touch screen, they recognize the "lasting presence of the effect of the Civil War and why people believe the raid was a catalyst to the war".

The interactive touch screen signifies the Park's attempt to contextualize Brown's life within the broader narrative of the American Civil War and memorialize him as a controversy based on Brown's relation to the Civil War. The objects present in the John Brown museum most crucial to this project however are the John Brown Sword and the John Brown Bible.

First of all, unlike many other artifacts of whose provenance the Historic Park cannot be sure, the sword and the bible have a very strong provenance[3] record. My informant confidently claims that the Bible was indeed John Brown's own bible that he read growing up and that shaped his belief that slavery was the utmost sin. With respect to the sword, my informant is unsure whether this exact sword was used during the Bloody Kansas Fight[4], but she once again confidently states that the sword indeed was John Brown's own sword and he used it during his lifetime. The presentation of the Bible and the Sword, as with the presentation of other objects, is determined by how these objects communicate a particular story. But the most important factor in the presentation of the Bible and the Sword is security. Both of these objects are the most crucial repositories of John Brown memorabilia. These two objects symbolize the contentious memories of Brown as either a martyr or a terrorist. He used his gun to inflict fear amongst the slaveholders from Bloody Kansas to bloody Harpers Ferry but he legitimized his use of the gun with his interpretation of the Bible. The Bible and the Sword are therefore the most crucial objects present at the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park. According to my informant, many visitors who may have already learned a lot about John Brown prior to visiting the Park would still feel awe to witness the actual Bible that shaped Brown's ideology and the sword that created the problem of violence. According to my informant, the exhibit designers did a fine job in making the Bible and the Sword highly visible and contextualized well-enough to legitimize their presence on the second floor of the John Brown museum that deals with the actual events of the raid rather than

[3] Provenance means the records that describe the history of the objects. It includes the letters and notes of people who used to posses them and the details that these people wrote on the authenticity of the artifact that they are donating to the Park.

[4] Before Brown raided Harpers Ferry, he was also involved in a fight at the border between Kansas and Missouri that led to the killing of a few slaveholders.

the third floor which deals with its aftermath. My informant argues that the presentation of the sword and the bible at Harpers Ferry almost evokes a form of religious experience. To assess my informant's suggestion is impossible. Without interviewing visitors, I cannot possibly affirm my informant's suggestion. However, the Bible and the Sword remain distanced from the visitor as they are present within a museum setting and belong to the museum as one of many artifacts relating to John Brown. Regardless of whether the visitor abhors Brown or hails him as a heroic figure, the Historic Park maintains a distance between the Bible, the Sword and the visitor. Rather than presenting these two objects in a way that propels the visitor to remember Brown in one way or another, the Park instead presents these objects as they are, separated from the visitors. Consequently, the Park gives leverage to the visitors to remember Brown however they choose to do so. These last two example of structures shaped by the National Historic Park both resist defining Brown one way or another because the maintaining such a neutral stance, according to the Park, is necessary in order to welcome visitors from all over the country. My informant suggests that the contentious memories of John Brown prevail amongst contemporary Americans. The controversial legacy of Brown speaks for itself at present-day Harpers Ferry too with two additional objects related to his raid: the obelisk and the monument dedicated to Heyward Shepherd.

The Engine House where the United States Marines captured John Brown on October 19th 1859 no longer exists as it did back then. In 1895, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad erected an obelisk as a substitute for the Fort. A few yards away from this obelisk stands a counter-monument of Hayward Shepherd (the first casualty of Brown's raid and surprisingly a free African-American) erected by the Daughters of the Confederacy (Shackel, 2008: 85). While the obelisk evokes memories of a struggle

against racial oppression, the monument to Heyward Shepherd questions the efficacy of the raid and in an interesting twist situates John Brown as detrimental to the freed African-Americans. While the Fort has been relocated and the museum produced anew, the obelisk and the Heyward Shepherd monument remain intact in their original position. The preservation of these two sites however re-affirms the narrative of John Brown as a controversial figure. Therefore the rhetoric of preservation distorts the image of the Civil War as a shared cultural heritage. In order to do so, the Park also reshapes the structures related to John Brown's raid so that they embed the memory of Brown as controversial. However if the need to remember Brown as a controversy arises out of the fear that visitors to the Park sustain the contentious memories of Brown from the 1859 time period, then how does the Historic Park retell Brown's raid to young adults? In the next chapter, I examine the production of memorializing Brown as controversial by focusing on the Park's interaction with the youth and comparing the Park's role as a three-dimensional classroom with the usual one-dimensional classrooms that the youth usually attend at school.

Chapter 3

The Harpers Ferry Classroom: Education, Citizenship and the Problem of Remembering John Brown

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The Harpers Ferry National Historic Park takes pride in educating the youth, a component that, according to my informant, lacks in other Civil War battlefields such as Gettysburg. The *Chief Interpreter and Historian* prefers to conceptualize the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park as a classroom. He argues, "We don't have walls. We don't need walls. You don't have to be inside walls to be taught and to be educated. So we are the actual sites where these events occur. In a classroom, it's always two-dimensional. Whether you are watching something on the computer or reading it on a book or seeing it on a video screen, it's still always two-dimensional. Whereas when you are here in the national park, it is always three-dimensional. It's the real place where the real thing happened for real people". The preservation of Harpers Ferry enables the present-day space of Harpers Ferry to take the young visitors on a journey of the history of Harpers Ferry. He laments that the present-day generation relies on computers to build its knowledge about the world because the world provided to them by technology is according to Frye a "faux world". In this world within a computer, the student fails to experience the world that the student seeks to understand. In his words, "you are not experiencing anything other than that relationship you have with that screen and that

keyboard". Therefore the main goal of the National Historic Park is to immerse the students in the history of Harpers Ferry by living through that history rather than simply reading about that history in history textbooks or on computer programs. But to what extent does the education at Harpers Ferry shapes their knowledge of John Brown differently than what the students learn in their textbooks at their usual school classrooms?

In this chapter, I argue that the National Historic Park distances from the traditional education of school as it strives to move away from the textbook and the computer and immerse the students in the actual space where historical events transpired. The educational component of the National Historic Park however aims to meet the standards of learning of schooling systems across the country. Both the National Historic Park and the U.S History textbooks consequently fail to define John Brown and mystify him as an enigma because the retelling of Brown's raid complicates the project of both school education and National Historic Park education to foster citizenship and civic values amongst young Americans.

The section below gives a brief sketch of John Brown's representation in two major distributors of U.S History textbooks across America: McGraw Hill Companies and Prentice Hall. I will then detail Harpers Ferry National Historic Park's Educational Component and its goal to immerse youngsters in the major histories of Harpers Ferry. Amongst these major histories, I focus upon the Historic Park's retelling of John Brown's raid to the youngsters and I do so by sharing my observations of a youth event for the National Leadership Youth Council and a series of short films on John Brown produced by students of Harpers Ferry Middle Students under the guidance of the National Historic

Park. I end this section by examining the different kinds of exhibits presented by the National Historic Park and highlight the tension between Neutrality and Immersion in these presentations.

John Brown in History Textbooks

James Loewen in *Lies My Teacher Told Me* argues that history textbooks narrate John Brown's raid in a highly rigid manner that centers on solely facts pertaining to the raid. In doing so, these narratives of John Brown's raid cloud John Brown's ideology in attacking Harpers Ferry and thus fail to engage the student in a productive conversation on the issue of race relations. He writes, "On the subject of race relations, John Brown's statement that 'this question is still to be settled' seems as relevant today, and even as ominous, as when he spoke in 1859" (Loewen, 1995: 173). But the textbooks fail to address this question. They "give a singularly inchoate view of that struggle" (Loewen, 1995: 173). Textbooks treat slavery without racism; textbooks also treat abolitionism without much idealism. Instead abolitionists such as John Brown are mystified and dehumanized. Lowen takes the example of *Discovering American History*[5] textbook and its narration of John Brown's raid that goes as follows:

> John Brown, son of an abolitionist, envisioned a plan to invade the South and free the slaves. In 1859, with financial support from abolitionists, Brown made plans to start a slave rebellion in Virginia, to establish a free state in the

[5] Published in 1967 by NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

> Appalachian Mountains, and to spread the rebellion through the South. On October 16th, 1859, Brown and eighteen of his men captured the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, in the present state of West Virginia…He and his men were captured by a force of marines. Brown was brought to trial and convicted of treason against Virginia, murder, and criminal conspiracy. He was hanged on December 2, 1859. (Loewen, 1995: 173)

The above passage presents all the factual events associated with John Brown's raid and thus Loewen regards it as a prototypical case of a neutral approach on retelling John Brown's raid. He argues that such bland paragraphs on John Brown's raid "don't imply that Brown was crazy, neither do they tell enough about him to explain why he became a hero to so many blacks and non-slaveholding whites" (Loewen, 1995: 173). This neutral stance of *Discovering American History* therefore fails to contextualize John Brown and his struggle against racism and thus fails to enable the students to understand him in any productive capacity. Discovering American History's narration of history is not rare unfortunately. Such forms of narratives manifest in other textbooks that I explored as part of this project to assess how the history of John Brown's raid is introduced to youngsters in high schools.

In my research, I came across *The American Journey* that was published by the McGraw Hill Incorporation in 2005. Although published forty years later than *Discovering American History, The American Journey* reflects a similar retelling of John Brown. It mentions that Brown led eighteen men, both black and white, on a raid at

Harpers Ferry but was ultimately defeated by local citizens and federal troops. As with *Discovering American History, The American Journey* ends its narration of Brown's raid by stating that Brown was convicted of treason and hanged. The section on the Civil War era of *The American Journey* calls attention to the problem of race, stating "By studying this era of our history, we can better understand the state of racial relations today and develop ways of improving them". However in its representation of John Brown, a man who epitomizes the struggle against slavery, The American Journey fails to address its own statement on why the student ought to read about the Civil War era. The textbook describes Brown as a man who thought God chose him to end slavery and this irrational vision led him into a rage. The neutral retelling of Brown's raid therefore fails to challenge statements such as "John Brown was almost certainly insane" that students come across reading *American History* or "Later Brown was proved to be mentally ill," opined in *The American Way*. Rather the factually correct remark that Brown was hanged and deemed a traitor conforms to such negative portrayals of John Brown.

Loewen's argues that the above retellings of Brown's raid that portray Brown as insane or the neutral representation of Brown that fails to critique such portrayals fall prey to a biased retelling of the history. For instance, they fail to highlight Governor Wise[6] reaction to Brown, calling him " a man of clear head" who showed "quick and clear perception", "rational premises and consecutive reasoning", "composure and self-possession" (Loewen, 1995: 174). In spite of witnessing Brown's rational side, Governor Wise pushed for Brown's hanging but the dehumanized representation of Brown inhibits the student who reads such textbooks to explore why Brown would remain rational, how

[6] The governor of Virginia who interrogated Brown once the U.S Marines captured him.

he reasoned so forcefully in defense of his raid and thus identify with Brown's struggle against racism.

The American Journey, and other textbooks that I researched such as *Creating America: A History of the United States* published in 2005 and *The American Nation* also published in 2005 fail to even mention John Brown's raid in their timeline of events leading to the American Civil War. Each one of them mention prior events such as the Missouri Compromise of 1850, the Dred Scott Case, the date *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published and Kansas-Nebraska Act but under the year of 1859, John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry remains visibly invisible. Events such as "The Drake Well becomes first U.S Oil Well" instead make the year 1859 famous. John Brown's raid therefore only occupies a brief paragraph out of the forty-plus pages that history textbooks cover on the Civil War section. And even the paragraph devoted to John Brown's raid resists defining Brown and rather mystifies him as someone incomprehensible. The American National for instance queries the question of whether John Brown was a hero or a villain but rather than answering that question, it encourages the students to reach their own conclusion by stating, "That depends on your point of view. To evaluate historical evidence, you must be able to identify bias". Although the suggestion that a student of history must be able to identify bias is apt, the textbook fails to recognize its own bias in this neutral retelling of Brown's raid. Rather than encouraging the student of American history to explore how the example of John Brown helps them understand and tackle present-day racial issues, Brown's actions is obscured, his religious ideas deemed irrational.

Loewen therefore rightfully critiques the notion of neutrality. "The flat prose that textbooks use for Brown is not really neutral" (Loewen, 1995: 177), he argues, because

these textbooks make a concerted attempt to withdraw any sympathy for Brown. Brown "was a serious Christian, well read on the Bible who took its moral commands to heart" (Loewen, 1995: 177), "yet our textbooks do not credit Brown with religiosity" (Loewen, 1995: 177). Textbooks such as *The American Pageant* fail to underscore the importance of Brown's religious ideas and instead reach conclusions on Brown as "narrowly ignorant" (Loewen, 1995: 177) and "God's angry man" (Loewen, 1995: 177). *The American Journey* however states that while some denounced Brown's use of violence, others viewed him as a hero and a martyr. But it goes on to define the term martyr as "a person who dies for a great cause" that completely ignores the religious connotation of the term and how defining John Brown a martyr in memory as does Henry David Thoreau represents an attempt to legitimize the violent acts or make them understandable and admirable. "Textbook authors ignore Brown's ideas because in their eyes his violent acts make him ineligible for sympathetic consideration", argues Loewen (Loewen, 1995: 179). Stripping the ideas that inspired Brown's raid and failing to relate abolitionism with slavery and the continuing problem of racial relations erases the significance of the raid to that era and to present-day young Americans.

Consequently, Loewen argues that "Brown's words, which moved a nation, therefore do not move students today" (Loewen, 1995: 178). Brown's words are instead silenced because Brown is understood as a person whose raid brought the nation on the brink of disaster. While Lincoln's quote "Let us strive to bind up the nation's wounds" are captured in large fonts in the middle of a page on the Civil War section of the textbook, Brown's quote on the necessity to spill blood to purge the guilt of slavery remains absent throughout the textbook.

U.S History textbooks therefore silence Brown's own voice. Even reactions to Brown's raid by poets such as Emerson and Thoreau who likened Brown to Christ are kept silenced because history lessons in the classrooms seek to instill civic values and mobilize a collective American spirit. In such a project, "neither Emerson nor Thoreau is of much help to the teacher of citizenship, who is supposed to convey why people should obey authority and why they have obligations to serve and defend their government" (Diggins, 2000: 132). The history of John Brown's raid therefore remains silenced and restricted to a neutral paragraph long narrative because John Brown complicates and even conflicts with the project of these textbooks to foster civic duties to the young students. Although some may consider John Brown an American hero, the textbooks do not because Brown does not exemplify the archetype of American citizenship. To what extent does the experience of youngsters differs between spending forty-five minutes everyday in a history classroom and visiting the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park? Although I did not interview any youngsters, I did observe the National Youth Leadership Conference participate in an event conducted by the Park on John Brown's raid and a series of short movie clips on John Brown produced by students of Harpers Ferry Middle School.

Although a visit to Harpers Ferry enables youngsters to explore the actual physical location where such historical events as John Brown's raid transpired, the educational component of the Historic Park does not distance itself from the teaching goals of the textbooks that the students read in their usual school setting. In the following section, I argue that the National Historic Park likewise engages in a project to mobilize future American citizens. Thus the National Historic Park likewise fails to define Brown,

retells a neutral narrative of Brown's raid, and in the process attempts to cast John Brown as a controversy.

Education at National Historic Park

The Harpers Ferry National Historic Park organizes two types of Educational Programs: *Curriculum Educational Program* and *General Visitors Education*. My informants frankly state that the Park puts more effort in the Curriculum Education Program more so than the General Visitors Education because the Park more directly engages in a one-on-one presentation with the youth in its Curriculum Education Program. The Park allows the parents to participate but does not necessarily encourage the parents to remain present. Therefore while the General Visitors Education Program is kept quite informal and casual, the Curriculum Education Program is formal. Through the Curriculum Education Program, the Park seeks to perform the role of educators and define the space of Harpers Ferry as a classroom outside a usual school classroom.

The Curriculum Education Program therefore seeks to meet the curriculum standards of public schools in states such as Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia and Pennsylvania, so that when a teacher comes to Harpers Ferry National Historic Park for a curricular program, he or she know exactly what they are going to get. They have usually done pre-work in the classroom before they have arrived, they take what they learn here and they do post work in the classroom when they return. Without achieving the curriculum standards, Harpers Ferry National Historic Park would not be able to attract school trips because such school trips are only approved if the experience leads towards

accomplishing the curriculum standards of the school. In other words, Harpers Ferry National Historic Park legitimizes its space as a classroom outside a traditional school classroom by maintaining the curriculum standards in its retelling of John Brown's raid to young adults.

Figure 1.1: A Paradigm of the Different Types of Educational Programs

Different Types of Educational Programs	Formal and Organized	Sets of Standards	Lines of Feedback	Curriculum Based?
Curriculum Education Program	Yes	Yes	Between the Youth and the Park Ranger	Yes
General Visitors Education Program	No	No	Between the Youth and the Parents	No

The National Historic Park's determination to provide the youth with an opportunity to learn American history in an environment even better than their classrooms is driven by two factors: first of all the National Historic Park does not feel that present-day American youth spend enough time learning about American history as it does learning science and math. Due to federal mandate to improve science and math grades, funding to study American history has suffered. Teachers no longer have any reason to take time to teach American history and the present-day generation therefore graduates from high school with only limited knowledge of topics such as the American Civil War. Secondly, the Park seeks to actively engage the youth with the hope that this younger generation of American citizens would someday support the National Historic Park in some capacity.

Youth- The Future Park Employees

Dennis Frye himself as a youngster got involved in Harpers Ferry as a member of the Historic Park's Youth Conservation Corp and now is the chief interpreter of the Historic Park. He hopes future Dennis Fryes will emerge because of the National Historic Park's concerted efforts to incorporate the youth in the everyday responsibilities of the Historic Park.

A student applies for an internship at the National Historic Park and commits to working for a 400-hour period. The interns apply through the web in a very competitive application. The Park accepts applications during the summer for around 20 positions. The Park provides the intern with housing and training and oversight and in return the Park expects the intern to function just as a paid employee, as if they were in a paid position because it wants the intern to feel they are in a real world environment. They are volunteers so they are typically in a 400- hour volunteer program. In addition to the internship positions that are usually available to undergraduate college students with interest in American History, the Park also offers a brand new internship program for youth at the high school and college level.

The Youth Intern program is a result of the thrust of the Obama administration to engage youth in public service, especially in places like the National Park and the National Forests. It does not pay much but it is not a volunteer program. The volunteers also engage with the public but not at the same level as the interns because they are typically younger and less mature. Another program that the Park provides is called the

Youth partnership program. This program is principally designed to encourage minorities to participate in public service. The Park recruits minorities principally locally to participate in this program.

According to Frye, the Park has had great success with this program and hopes that someday these youth would pursue a career in government service. These are kids in high school or very early in their college education. Then finally the Park has a program called the Youth Conservation Corps, which pays minimum wages. These are young people who are high school students between the ages of 15 and 18 who work eight weeks. And they have less responsibility because they are younger, because they do not have the experience. But they too are engaged in family programs and presentations to the youth and in the living history educational program along with the visitors' service program. Each of these programs reflects an attempt of the National Historic Park to mobilize the youth to care about American history.

By learning about the historical events of Harpers Ferry, the Park hopes that this younger generation of American citizens would be able to better understand present-day issues and thus a more conscientious generation of American citizens. As conscientious citizens who are well versed in the history of United States, they will emerge as future leaders of America. The Park attends to the youth more so than to the adults in order to fulfill this vision. But how is this young generation of future American leaders supposed to interpret John Brown's raid?

Figure 1.2: Taxonomy of the Different Ways the National Historic Park Incorporates the Youth

Different Ways the National Historic Park Incorporates The Youth	Internships
	Youth Intern Program
	Youth Partnership Program
	Youth Conservation Corps

The story of John Brown complicates this project because Brown's raid represents an attack on American soil and a dismissal of the United States Constitution. But Brown may also be a heroic figure to some. Although he could not witness the liberation of slaves in his own life, his vision to see slaves liberated was at least legally accomplished a few years after his death with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. In what ways does the Historic Park connect the youngsters to Brown?

During my ethnographic research, I did not interview any young adults to ask them to describe their experience of visiting Harpers Ferry. However, I observed and took notes on a specific event for a group of young adults called the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC). Unlike usual students from a public school or children of visitors to Harpers Ferry, the NYLCA is a group of young adults assembled from all over the country who possess civic leadership abilities and usually have excellent academic records. Although they are considered bright young adults and in some ways more sophisticated than regular young adults, their memory of Brown was shaped by how the tour guide presented Brown's raid to them.

NYLC Event Field Observation

Early one morning I entered the Visitors Center to find a couple of people dressed in period clothing. Upon a closer look, I recognized them as the teachers[7] for the National Youth Leadership Conference students. The National Youth Leadership Conference is a group of young adults from all corners of United States who travel together to various places across America that are considered to be of historical significance. During that day, they stopped at Harpers Ferry and the Park Services prepared an event for them on John Brown's raid. Each of these teachers was assigned a particular group of students categorized as "Communication Group 1", Communication Group 2" and so on. The story of John Brown's raid that they had planned to narrate to the NYLC students were divided into the following sections: Harpers Ferry and thoughts on change, John Brown has a plan, John Brown's raid, and finally the Reaction. This structure to the storytelling as divided into different chapters not only reflects a very formal and organized attitude of the Park towards immersing the young adults in Harpers Ferry History but in fact is also intended to resonate with the organization of curriculum standards at schools.

By dividing its story into various chapters, the Historic Park is shaping its commemoration of John Brown to young adults as various chapters in a history textbook but with the advantage that the content presented at Harpers Ferry, unlike the content of the textbooks, is situated in the real setting where these historical events took place. This classroom-like academic ethos is further strengthened by the intentional act of the teachers to identify the children in the NYLC group as 'scholars'. I mingled with the

[7] They are employees of the Park and some of them include newly graduated college students.

teachers for a little while until a few school buses arrived at the Visitors Center. Once the bus started to move from the Visitor Center to the downtown section of Harpers Ferry, one of the teachers stared to engage with the scholars by asking how many of them belonged to various states across United States. Doing this activity allowed the teachers to better understand their backgrounds and it heightened the interest of the students as they would proudly hold their hands up as the teacher uttered the name of their state.

The storytelling activity took place in the grounds adjacent to the Shenandoah River in the downtown section of Harpers Ferry, behind the John Brown Fort and the administrative buildings of the National Historic Park on Shenandoah Street. I joined one of the groups of scholars. As the students started to walk towards this field, one of the teachers exclaimed, "Now I will show where John Brown came from to this town" to heighten the effect of living through the real historical setting where the history that these children are about to learn actually occurred. We walk up stairs a few yards behind John Brown's Fort, scholars take a few scenic pictures of the land surrounding them, they open their journals and the teacher takes over.

Before even mentioning John Brown or Harpers Ferry, the teacher asked the children to mention one thing they would like to change about the world. This question at first seemed slightly too broad or even unrelated in a storytelling event about John Brown's raid but later on I realized this question allowed these middle school students known for their leadership skills to ask similar questions that John Brown must have asked before making his decision to change America for the better by attacking Harpers Ferry. What kind of visions drive ones actions? It is this broad level question that the teacher encouraged the scholars to think about. Interestingly, the first response to this

question came from a scholar who expressed her disgust for the governor of New York and desired to change the world for the better by assassinating him.[8] How easily the mind thinks of substantive and possible violent acts when one contemplates such a foundational question as how to change the world! Then the topic centered more on John Brown. The teacher asked, what did John Brown want to change in the world? To this, the scholars unanimously responded with the term 'slavery'. Then the teacher asked, what method did he employ to emancipate the slaves? The one response to this question was the word 'violence'.

There have been many historical events that have cost millions of more lives than the eighteen who lost their lives during John Brown's raid (many of whom include John Brown himself and members of his provisional army) but some of these events are even forgotten while the defining characteristic of Brown's raid remains violence. However if Brown's raid is placed within the broader category of the American Civil War rather than as a separate event preceding the Civil War, then this raid could very well be defined as the defining moment of the most violent war in American history. Why did some of the scholars distance themselves from the raid based on the violence perpetrated by the raid? Or even better, how did the scholars situate the history of Brown's raid in relation to other historical events as they concluded the raid to be a violent method of changing the world? The latter half of this tour where the students were asked to perform a debate reveals that most of how the scholars constructed their meaning of Brown's raid was by placing him in relation to other historic events that they learned about in school.

[8] Although they behaved quite maturely, they expressed some grave thoughts.

The teacher then asks the scholars to list all things that come to their mind when they think of Brown and scholars cited such terms as ‘abolitionist’, ‘violent’, and ‘Connecticut’. The teacher then narrated his story about Brown’s raid, basing it around the theme of tragedy and failure. He began with a brief biography of Brown’s life before his attack at Harpers Ferry. He mentioned that at the age of five, Brown’s family moved to Ohio from his birth state of Connecticut. He then started to ask questions that encouraged the scholars to relate their daily lives to John Brown’s life. He let the scholars reflect on the question, how many of you perform chores in the household. He mentioned that at the age of twelve, Brown was already tasked with a job. He then highlighted a painful story from Brown’s childhood that probably was the first step in making Brown a staunch abolitionist. As a child, Brown witnessed a slave master beat a slave with an iron shovel. Other stories of this incomprehensible tragedy include the mention of Brown’s first wife dying upon the birth of her seventh child. The story presented Brown’s life as a series of tragedies and failures up until his last few months of life with the attack on Harpers Ferry. And then he envisions his attack on Harpers Ferry.

The teacher mentioned one of the most unnoticed aspects of Brown’s raid at Harpers Ferry- Brown envisioned that the fruits of his actions would come in the shape of a new nation that would be far more successful in liberating blacks than the United States of America. Probably the most enjoyable moment of my ethnographic research occurred at this moment as one of the scholars queried what would Brown’s new nation be called? And found a fine answer, “Old Johnny Brownsville”. Surprisingly, there were no fits of laugher and giggles as if no one even heard him but I nevertheless found the name assigned by him quite hilarious.

Later on the children performed a historical reenactment of the raid. Each scholar performed the role of one the characters involved in the raid, ranging from main characters such as John Brown to minor characters such as one of his provisional army members. The scholars formed a large circle so that everyone could view each other's performance and the teacher stressed to them the need to add inflection to their voice and attempt to produce as theatrical as possible a recreation of Brown's raid. The historic reenactment was composed of quotes from the various characters involved in the raid, enabling the scholars to perform that event in their own life without necessarily presenting a particularly skewed or biased interpretation of the raid. Finally after the conclusion of this physically stimulating activity, the last section of the event called 'reflection' begins.

The teacher asks a simple question of each one of the scholars and asks them to take a position on it. The question is as follows: If you were alive on October 16th 1859, would you have joined John Brown's provisional army? The teacher cautions the scholars not to treat this question as a referendum on slavery. Everyone may choose to take an anti-slavery stance but that does not necessitate that everyone would need to join Brown's army.

I wonder however whether the scholars could have stayed true to the teacher's directions. Is it possible to relapse into a century and a half old society without considering all the historical changes that have occurred since then? How could the children have possible situated themselves in Brown's world and wrestled with the agonies faced by Brown? Their memory of Brown's raid necessitated them to address

why they would have joined Brown or not joined Brown based on other historical events, most important of which is the American Civil War.

Interestingly, half of the scholars chose not to join Brown's raid while the other half argued that it would have joined Brown's raid had they been living back then. Both sides defended their position by giving examples from other historical events that occurred after Brown's raid that the teacher objected to because if they were present in 1859, they would not have known about the occurrence of these events. For instance, the side in favor of the raid argued that they would have joined Brown's raid because the raid instigated the Civil War that resulted in the liberation of slaves. However the question arises whether Brown would have supported that pathway to the liberation of slaves. If he envisioned making a different country, to what extent would he have been content with the liberation of slaves in the existing United States? And what would Brown have thought of the American Civil War? Would he have approved such massive killings that occurred during the Civil War? But beneath these two critiques is the more obvious one, i.e. how would they have known anything about the Emancipation Proclamation signed after the Civil War back in 1859? Similarly, the group that chose not to join the Provisional army evoked the language of violence, arguing that they would have preferred a struggle that resonates more with the peaceful protest model espoused by Gandhi and Martin Luther King rather than the violent method of Brown.

Secondly, the debate conducted by the teacher at the conclusion of the event exemplifies Harpers Ferry National Historic Park's attempt to complicate the persona of John Brown. The various reasons why some kids argued they would have joined Brown's provisional army and others argued they would not reveals Harpers Ferry National

Historic Park's attempt to represent John Brown as a controversial figure whether in 1859 or in the present-day. And the memory of Brown as controversial are furthermore centered upon a timeless argument, one portraying John Brown as a man whose acts led to the emancipation of slaves and the other belittling Brown's decision to attack Harpers Ferry and remembering him as an irresponsible lunatic rather than a valorized hero. This event symbolizes the National Historic Park's effort to openly address the contentious debates on Brown's memory by relying on undeniable facts and maintaining a neutral stance. The production of John Brown's memory as a controversy not only manifested in the debate amongst the NYLC students but also reflects in other events that the Park conducts for youngsters.

Acting, Producing and Directing John Brown

One of the Park's employees graciously lent me two DVD's of activities that the Park organized for youngsters a few years ago. One of these films called "Of the Students, By the Students, For the Students" is a complication of short films where students from Harpers Ferry Middle School[9] perform the role of characters involved in Brown's raid. The students not only perform the role of actors but they are also responsible for directing, editing, videotaping and choosing the background music of the film. Each of these short films focuses upon different aspects of the raid.

For instance, one film devotes to the life of Dangerfield Newby, an African-American whose wife remains a possession of a master as he joins John Brown to start a

[9] This is a public school located about twenty minutes walk away from Downtown section of Harpers Ferry.

slave rebellion at Harpers Ferry. He is one of the first casualties of the raid. The two movies that were most informative in relation to my observation of NYLC event were "Troubling Water" and "Children of the Raid".

"Troubling Water" is a movie on John Brown's life and the raid and it expresses many of the points highlighted by the teacher of the NYLC event. For instance, 3 children act out the scene where Brown, during his childhood, witnesses a slave child beaten violently. The movie starts off with a child acting the role of John Brown by wearing a white beard made out of wool and reading a letter than Brown wrote once he was sentenced to death. The child reads the letter, stating that he did not intent harm on property and killing but only sought to free the slaves. The movie then asks, "What makes Brown a leader? A Radical or a Martyr?" and further questions whether Brown was "successful or unsuccessful". The producers of this movie would share sentiments with NYLC group that chose to side with John Brown when asked whether they would have joined Brown's provisional army if they were alive back in 1859. Like the response from those children, this group of movie producers highlights Brown's success in addressing the issue of slavery. The background voice of the movie states, "From our perspective, he (John Brown) is the antidote of slavery. Yes he killed so that the slaves could live free". Although they do personally affirm Brown's actions, they nonetheless relegate the discourse of Brown's martyrdom within a topic of debate and contestation. Therefore their positive remembrance of Brown abides by the Park's production of Brown's memory as a controversy. They recognize that Brown is controversial but nonetheless stand behind Brown. The young adults who learn about John Brown engage in more interactive learning exercises than the bland ritual of reading a list of events and

a brief explanation of each of these events that they experience in the usual classroom setting. However, like the textbooks that these students read in their usual classroom, the Harpers Ferry classroom makes a concerted effort to resist defining John Brown and allow the students to remember Brown in whatever way they wish to remember Brown as long as their memory of Brown they is informed by the framework of understanding the history of his life as highly complicated and controversial. The following section of this chapter focuses on the artifacts and the exhibits, the sites where visitors acquire their shared memory of Brown as controversial.

Exhibits and Objects

The Harpers Ferry National Historic Park currently possesses close to eight thousand artifacts and records the archival information on the background of these artifacts at the Cultural Resources Management Division. I had the opportunity to interview one of the few Park Services personnel who works in this division of the Historic Park. Her primary responsibility at the Cultural Management Division is to maintain records of the artifacts; thus she proudly proclaims herself to be the "object girl". These archival records not only include the concrete objects presented in exhibits but also a vast list of books, newspaper articles, and other forms of literature that deals with the history of Harpers Ferry and John Brown's raid. In many ways, the evolution of this archival record informs us about the history of the commemoration of John Brown since the park's inception in 1944 to present-times. For instance, the archives include the documents published during the one-hundred year commemoration of John Brown's Raid

in 1959 including a speech delivered by a West Virginian Congressman that did not even include Brown's name in the entire speech. Therefore not only the reference to Brown's raid in these archival records but also the absence of Brown's name in these records reveals much about how much the National Historic Park has evolved in its commemoration of John Brown. Commemoration of Brown's raid therefore has a history of its own at the National Historic Park.

At Harpers Ferry, the stance of neutrality shapes the Park's collection of archival records. For instance, if a book review came out with five positive reviews and five negative reviews, the National Historic Park would ensure that both positive and negative book reviews were assembled in the archival record of the Park. One could argue whether this practice necessarily illustrates a stance of neutrality or simply a thorough archiving of relevant material. Nonetheless, the Historic Park considers its utmost responsibility to present all the disparate viewpoints and considers doing so an act of neutrality. Moreover, the archival record must not concentrate upon only some topics over the rest. For instance, the archival records must not only include books and articles written on the Civil War even though the basis of tourism at Harpers Ferry is the Historic Park's preservation of the place as a Civil War battlefield. In the words of my informant, the Park must consider "Every object, and every resource in equal priority".

The type of files recorded in the archives is categorized as Primary Source Materials and Secondary Source Materials. Primary Source Materials are original records written by a witness or otherwise derived from the time of that event. For instance, Primary Materials would include all the newspaper articles, the photographs, and the scholarly works published by the Historic Park in a conference during the 150th

commemoration of John Brown. Secondary resources however are people writing about stuff that happened, which invites much bias. They include biographies of John Brown written by historians after Brown's raid. The collection of these materials is shaped by the Interpretive Themes of the Park. Therefore the materials must in some way correspond to the six Interpretive Themes of the Park: John Brown's Raid, The Civil War, Industry, National History, Storer College, and African-American History.

Figure 1.3: Taxonomy of Different Kinds of Interpretive Themes

Different Kinds of Interpretive Themes	John Brown's Raid
	Civil War
	Industry
	National History
	Storer College
	African-American History

The process by which the Park determines whether a particular material corresponds to any one of the Interpretive Themes is termed as a Scope of Collection. The Scope of Collections dictates how the National Historic Park collects artifacts in its museum exhibits. Informal scope of collection includes the majority of the documents collected by the Park but they differ from the Formal scope of collection that includes materials where the acquisition requires a legal approval. For instance in case of John Brown's raid, the National Park collects all original objects associated with John Brown, the raiders, the raid, and anything that happened in this place. And the Park will also

collect commemorative items associated with John Brown and the raid. The Park develops a scope that proscribes what they collect for each one of the Interpretive Themes. The Formal Scope of Collection pertains to items that the Park collects legally. Archaeological findings do not correspond to any Scope of Collection. Since they are material dug up from areas surrounding Harpers Ferry, they do not have to be approved legally. The artifacts collected in the park automatically become part of the Park's collection without necessarily having a scope of collection. Furthermore, archaeological findings are some of the cleanest collections because their source of origin, unlike other artifacts, is well known and thus their authenticity is easily established. All of these artifacts shape how the Historic Park constructs its exhibits.

The exhibits are in some ways more important than the tour guides because the Park can only employ a few Park Rangers to narrate the story of Brown's raid and other histories of Harpers Ferry to its visitors. In most cases, the Park communicates its story to the visitors through these exhibits. Many of these exhibits are housed within a museum setting such as the exhibit of John Brown's bible and sword that is presented inside the John Brown museum. Other exhibits however also include large structures outside an enclosed space such as the obelisk that denotes the place where the United States Marines captured Brown.

The Living History exhibit represents a period in the nineteenth century in order to create a space that enables the visitors to experience what life was like back then. The Historic Park does not necessarily replicate the town to its mid-nineteenth century conditions but by using reproductive objects[10] it attempts to paint a picture of mid-

[10] 'Reproductive' means that the object are not real objects from the 19th century but are instead produced in present-day time and looks similar to objects from the 19th century.

nineteenth century cultural milieu. For instance the wash shop reveals how tiresome of a job it was back in the nineteenth century to do such a menial act as washing clothes. Living History exhibits therefore allows people to understand and immerse themselves in a period, culture and time that are very different from the time and period we live in today where everything occurs instantaneously.

Figure 1.4: Taxonomy of Different Kinds of Exhibits

Different Kinds Of Exhibits	Living History/ Outdoor Period Exhibits	Ready-Made Clothing Store
		Blacksmith Shop
		Wash-Station
		Dry Goods Store
	Completely Plain Interpretive Exhibits/ Second Category Exhibits	Lewis and Clarke Exhibit
		Black Voices
		Ledger Exhibit
	Traditional Museum Exhibits	John Brown's Museum
		The Civil War Museum
		The African-American Museum
		Industry Museum
		Natural History Museum
	Architectural Exhibits	John Brown's Fort
		Obelisk commemorating Browns' captured location
		Monument to Hayward Shepherd

The Second Category Exhibits, also more informally known as the books-on-walls exhibits are not filled with objects. They are highly interactive and almost exclusively interpretive exhibits. They are there to teach you something. The Black

Voices Exhibit is a good example of a Second Category Exhibit. It lacks any original museum object but the visitors may still interact with clothing and different little reproductive objects from the time period when slavery existed. It teaches the visitors about the lives of Black Americans who lived in this town and more broadly about slavery in the United States. Traditional Museums include text panels, museum objects, and sometimes a little bit of the other two. Generally they are traditional exhibits with objects that are clearly labeled as original. The John Brown Museum exemplifies a traditional museum.

Neutrality at Risk: Passive and Active Exhibits

My informant further distinguishes two ways of teaching and learning with objects: Hands on History Exhibits and Passive Exhibits. Hands on History Exhibits present the objects in an active dialogue with the visitor. Most often, a Park ranger and interpret would mediate the dialogue between the object and the visitor by narrating the story of that object to the visitor and explaining the relevance of it in the exhibit. Passive exhibits, on the other hand, do not involve much interaction between the visitor and the object. The visitor observes the object, most probably also thinks about the object but that does not entail that the visitor performs a constructive interaction with the exhibit. If anything, the interaction occurs in the mind of the visitor. The interaction impacts the visitor but the visitor never impacts the object. In other words, the visitor does not have the opportunity to interpret the object and share his or her interpretation with the Park. Passive Exhibits therefore strip the visitors from shaping any interpretation on their part.

My informant elaborated on this distinction between a passive exhibit and a hands-on history exhibit by illustrating with an example of handcuffs as artifacts that shape the interpretation on slavery in the Black Voices Exhibit.

Being such a sensitive issue, my informant asks, "How do I present an object associated with slavery such as hand cuffs, and get people to touch it and interact with it. What would a group of young African-American teenagers think about it and interactions they are having with it?" In an exhibit where the visitors shape the interpretation of the object, visitors such as African-Americans who observe the handcuffs would have a say in the presentation and contextualization of these objects. They may write their reaction to the exhibit on a comment slip and their reaction to this exhibit would in return compel the Historic Park to reflect upon its presentation of the exhibit and make any changes that it deemed necessary based on the response of visitors. The Industry Museum on the other hand, is "one old school sucker". The visitors complain that the text corresponding to the objects in the Museum makes them feel like fifth graders. It feeds them everything they need to know without encouraging them to reflect on the exhibits or provide any reaction that could help revise the interpretation of the objects in the museum.

To my informant's dismay, a majority of exhibits at the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park fall under the category of passive exhibit. Nevertheless, she hopes the Park would make a few changes in its presentation of exhibits that would make them much more interactive for the youth. She believes the park could make great use of video technologies such as podcasts to attract the youngsters towards helping shape the interpretation of exhibits. She envisions the youngsters would comment upon their experience of visiting exhibits and the Interpretation Division of the Park would rely on

these podcast videos to develop future exhibits. The visitors would play an instrumental role in producing these videos, similar to the Harpers Ferry middle school children who produced "By the Students, To the Students, For the Students".

Figure 1.5: Paradigm of Different Kinds of Exhibits

Different kinds of Exhibits	Requires Interpretation	Objects play a significant role	Deals with Complex Topics
Civil War Museum	Yes	Yes	Yes
African-American Museum	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clothing Store	No	Yes; reproduced objects	No
Blacksmiths Shop	No	Yes; reproduced objects	No
Wash Station	No	Yes; reproduced objects	No
Black Voices Exhibit	Yes	No	Yes
Storer College Museum	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lewis and Clarke Exhibit	Yes	Yes; but reproduced objects	Somewhat
John Brown Museum	Yes	Yes; real objects	Yes

My informant further suggests that a better use of archaeological findings would also help the Park develop interactive exhibits because they would provide much leverage to the visitors to construct their own interpretation of the artifacts. She illustrates her support for more archaeological exhibits by highlighting the interactive characteristics of an exhibit of a wheel located in the ground between Shenandoah Street and the Shenandoah River. She argues that this exhibit of a wheel is the only exhibit that

illustrates the significance of archaeology. This exhibit presents artifacts to understand the past history of the common people whose voices would otherwise remain unheard. The artifacts that they left behind carry their stories and archaeology enables the visitor to interact with these artifacts. However, without the knowledge of these people, the visitor gains much leverage to interpret their story through interacting with the artifacts unearthed from archaeological excavations. She hopes the Park Services can in future find ways to weave archaeology into its presentation of exhibits on John Brown's Raid and allow archaeological findings to impact the interpretation of stories that the Park narrates to its visitors. The ideal exhibit, according to my informant, brings those different resources together and visually displays them and interprets them with minimal text. The problem however with archaeology is that once excavated, the objects need to be conserved but conservation requires ample extra funding.

Figure 1.6: Paradigm of Different Kinds of Funding Sources

Different Kinds of Funding Sources	Source of Funding	Applicability of Funding
Fee Enhancement Dollars	Visitors	Varied
Congressional Ad-on	United States Congressional Budget	Specific Programs

So the choice becomes one of conserving ten artifacts or simply relying on thousands of reproductive items. If possible, my informant would like the Park Services to rely more on real objects via archaeological excavation that would enable the Park to develop more interactive exhibits and incorporate the visitors in the process of interpretation. My informant's vision to develop more interactive exhibits, especially for

the young adults, would help attract the youngsters to the Park and enable them to learn about history in a more engaging manner than how history is taught in classrooms.

However an interactive exhibit on sensitive issues such as slavery and race may force the Park to define John Brown. For instance, what if a group of African-American visitors react to the exhibit on slavery and handcuffs by suggesting that the National Historic Park ought to proclaim John Brown as a martyr since his sacrifice was meant to end the tradition of slavery. Would the Park revise their interpretation in response to this suggestion?[11]

The Harpers Ferry National Historic Park strives to maintain a neutral stance especially on its commemoration of John Brown's raid. While my informant who works at the Cultural Resource Management hopes the Park would create more interactive exhibits, her suggestion may create a situation where visitors to the Park are influenced to remember historic figures such as John Brown in a particular way. The National Historic Park strives to maintain a neutral stance on its retelling of John Brown raid and produces Brown's memory as controversy due to this rhetoric of neutrality.

In the next chapter, I deconstruct the notion of neutrality and explore what memorializing John Brown as a controversy achieves. What are the politics behind maintaining a neutral stance towards John Brown and how does the present-day landscape of Harpers Ferry as a National Historic Park necessitates the resistance to define Brown? I employ Halbwachs thesis on collective memory to address these questions. By doing so, I hope to reveal why the notion of a past reconstructed according to the demands of the present-day context connects my interest in Bellah's thesis on the

[11] I did not ask this question directly to my informant but I hypothesize this situation to confront the problem of neutrality in active exhibits.

American Civil Religion with my ethnography of the Historic Park and its commemoration of John Brown as controversy.

Chapter 4

The Broken Covenant: Remembering John Brown and the American Civil War

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The National Historic Park commemorates Brown as controversial and the resistance to define him enables the Park to maintain a neutral stance and give leverage to the visitors to remember Brown however they wish to remember him. I argue that although Brown's memory as a controversy is naturalized, it does not represent the only conceivable manner of remembering him. Commemoration of Brown as a controversy rather results out of the present-day cultural landscape of Harpers Ferry as a site that welcomes Americans from all over the country to assemble at Harpers Ferry and collectively celebrate and commemorate the American Civil War.

Memorializing John Brown as a controversy therefore represents an attempt to conform the narrative of Brown's raid in a commemorative practice that mobilizes a unified American identity but it also suggests that Americans do not look back at the Civil War as a collective and unified citizenry celebrating a common past. Consequently while memorializing John Brown as a controversy strives to address the logic of the American Civil Religion, it also exemplifies Bellah's concern of the broken covenant.

In what follows, I initially describe the structure of the National Historic Park and then reveal the necessity to produce the memory of John Brown as controversial at a space of tourist attraction such as Harpers Ferry. I do so by comparing thoughts on John

Brown by one of my informant who heads the interpretation sector of the National Historic Park and another who is unaffiliated with the National Historic Park but nonetheless highlights the need to complicate John Brown in the presence of visitors across the country who attend his tours at Harpers Ferry. I then deconstruct the notion of neutrality based on Halbwachs thesis of memory produced in a re-imagination of the past and explain why Brown's commemoration as controversy exemplifies Bellah's concern that the American Civil Religion remains an unfulfilled promise.

Structure of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park

The Harpers Ferry National Historic Park is separated into five divisions: Maintenance, Interpretation, Resource Management, Administration, and Law Enforcement. The Maintenance Division includes custodial work such as painting in order to maintain the land and structures belonging to the National Historic Park. The Interpretation section is the core division that interacts with visitors and narrates the story of the Historic Park.

Dennis Frye, my initial informant, is the chief of the Interpretation Division. He leads the group of Park Rangers, Interns and other workers who present the Park's interpretation of the history of Harpers Ferry directly to the visitors through programs such as the Education Program, Living History Program and the Visitor Services Program. The Education Program directly addresses the youth groups and young adults who visit the Historic Park. The Living History Program is primarily intended for the parents of these young adults. And the Visitor Services orients the visitors to the Park,

both the young ones and the adult. The Resource Management Section and the Interpretation section of the Historic Park used to belong within the same division but recently Resource Management carved its own division in the Historic Park.

The Resource Management Division is the brain of the Historic Park. It stores the Cultural and Natural Landscape resources of the Park and collects background on and descriptions of the artifacts within the domain of the National Historic Park. The records of artifacts collected by the Resource Management Section guides the Park on preparing the exhibits where these artifacts tell a particular story of Harpers Ferry.

The Administrative section of the Park is responsible for all human resources. They maintain all the budgetary issues, hire workers, and fix the salaries of the different groups of workers. The principal responsibility of the Law Enforcement Division is to protect park resources and the park's visitors. For instance, sometimes trespassers vandalize artifacts present at Civil War campgrounds located on the mountains surrounding Harpers Ferry. The Law Enforcement Management strives to curb such acts. Amongst all of these divisions, the ones that concern me the most are the Interpretation Division and the Resource Management Division because they are directly involved in shaping the commemoration of John Brown.

The National Historic Park characterizes the history of John Brown's raid as a construction of multiple perspectives that most often clash with each other. The Park hence considers its ultimate responsibility to present the multifarious voices of the past to its present day visitors. Interestingly, the responsibility to present all the different points of views is not distinctive of the National Historic Park. One of my informants, unaffiliated with the National Historic Park, also expressed similar viewpoints on the job

of the storyteller in presenting the history of Harpers Ferry and the history of John Brown in particular. The following section puts my two informants in a conversation in order to address the problem at stake in present-day Harpers Ferry on commemorating John Brown's raid in 1859.

Commemorating Controversy: Two Surprisingly Similar Attitudes

Dennis Frye, the Chief Historian of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, and Rick "Oh Be Joyful"[12] Garland are storytellers of John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry. But while Frye works for a federal agency, Garland operates on his own. To what extent do their contrasting backgrounds impact their attitude towards history and the role of the storyteller in commemorating that history? What follows is a short excerpt from my interviews with the two of them that unveils their attitude towards the commemoration of John Brown's raid. I begin with Frye's attitude towards commemorating John Brown, a section of my ethnography that emerged when Frye introduced the following question, "How do you commemorate controversy?" He went to answer this question as follows:

> And again what you do and what you say on your own time is something we don't have control over. But if you say it publicly before a public group, we have total control over you. And so we instill this culture of neutrality in terms of the fact that history….it's not our job to tell people what to think about history. It's not our job to tell people what to

[12] Nickname that he brands on his website.

think about our historic characters. It is our job to present these characters as complex, to present the reactions to them as more complex and then people figure out for themselves where they stand on the complexities. History is not one-dimensional like no human being is one-dimensional. And so you are being really unfair to the presentation of history if you try to say, "this is the way it happened". No, that's not the way it happened. We don't know the way it happened. All we know is what they told us about what happened.

People have very different perspectives, usually animated, sometimes angry perspectives where they just totally disagree with the opposing point of view to the degree that they are willing to hurt other people or certainly not respect other people for their point of view. This is what we are dealing here with John Brown.

Our goal is to keep us out of trouble and let the historic characters present their own stories. And that's our job. So that's what I mean by this culture of neutrality. No matter what I think about anything I don't share what I think. But it's perfectly legitimate for me to share what they (the historic characters) thought. And I can do that by sharing quotations from that time, from newspaper articles, from journals, from diaries, from letters; using all those sources that they wrote and making my public certain that's what they had to say about the matter. And I am just simply sharing that with you.

What that does is that they hear voices from the past. They are hearing my voice simply as a conveyance. What they are really hearing is John Brown speaking, or what they are really hearing is Prosecutor Andrew Hunter speaking, or what they are really hearing is Abraham Lincoln speaking. And so when you bring those voices to them and they hear all of these different voices, and all these different opinions and all these different opinions, then I have succeeded. I am doing my job. I am making them aware that people don't agree on this. Isn't that interesting? People don't agree. Can you imagine that? People don't agree. And so that's our job not to run away from controversy but to present it, to put it right in people's face and not to be alarmed by disagreement but to share it. And admit that we usually are disagreeing about things. That's what keeps us unique. That's what separates me from my dog that agrees with everything I do.

The National Historic Park welcomes American from all over the country to visit Harpers Ferry but the presence of Americans from all over the country also presents a problem in terms of remembering John Brown. Frye confesses that the Historic Park remains wary of the visitor and their "animated, sometimes angry" perspectives on John Brown, thus suggesting that the contentious reactions to John Brown's raid in 1859 sustain a century and a half later. As a federal institution that strives to mobilize all Americans, the National Historic Park cannot risk challenging or questioning a visitor's perspective on John Brown. Frye consequently warns his fellow Park Rangers to abstain from sharing their personal opinions of John Brown with the visitors. The promise to maintain a neutral stance represents an attempt to mobilize all Americans and retell the raid of John Brown in such a way that the visitors grasp knowledge of this history without necessarily having to re-think their original stance on John Brown.

Unlike Dennis Frye, Rick Garland is not an employee of the National Historic Park. He instead conducts his personal tours of the Harpers Ferry and has complete leverage over how he presents his tours. Nevertheless, his reflection on commemorating John Brown in many ways echoes Frye's sentiments. He started to reflect on John Brown mid way through answering my question to describe his morning tours at Harpers Ferry.

> Then we go down and talk about the John Brown segment by stopping at the monument that you probably saw on the block that talked about Hayward Shepherd. It's a free black man, John Brown comes here to free the black guy and the first guy mortally wounded is a free black guy. And we talk about the fact that that monument is very controversial because the bottom of it says thank you to the blacks that remained loyal to the confederacy and didn't put a stain on either race.
> Now that's a controversial statement. That's a true statement because I always quote Abraham Lincoln at this

point: nothing is ever one thing or all another. It's always somewhere in between. And there will be some blacks that remain loyal to the confederacy. How ironic that you read that as controversial and many people don't understand that it actually is true. The United Daughters Of Confederacy who put that monument up have rewritten history fairly in some parts of country such as Tennessee where people grow up thinking they were rebels during the Civil War, which isn't the case because they were unionists. But if you grow up not reading your history books but the monuments that the Daughters put up, you would grow up thinking you were a rebel. You weren't. But this monument actually is true. It's ironic but it's true.

Frederick D. says that if JB didn't win his war on slavery, at least he started the war that ended slavery. You know to a large portion of our population, he is a hero. He is a martyr. Because of JB's symbol as the war that ended slavery is the reason that the first African-American assembly would be here in Harpers Ferry and they would have a prayer meeting. Bunch of fellas are going to come at 6 o clock in the morning and take a walk down to JB's fort, which wasn't here, but 2 miles away on a farm. One of the fella takes his shoes off and the other asks what are you doing? I am getting ready to walk on hallowed ground. I couldn't possibly do that with my shoes on. Every black guy took his shoes off. There is a great picture, water colored painting of every black guy taking his shoes off and it's been sold in the bookshop. So yeah all of our population consider him an absolute hero, a martyr. But then I say wait a minute…let's just say that the saloon was still open and we could get a couple of old Tangle foots. And while we are in there, we decide that some people in America are downtrodden and oppressed. No one has helped them or brought light to their terrible situation and we have decided that we are going to help them. And we figure the easiest way to help these people is to get some publicity and the best way to do that…somehow make the 11 o clock news to Washington DC. And we figure the best way to do that is lets take the train down to Washington and capture a building. I bet that would get us on the 11o clock news. Now we don't mean anybody any harm. We just want to capture the building and help the people. But just by accident somebody who couldn't handle their old tangle foot shot a couple of Americans and killed them. What are they gonna do to us now. They would want to hang us. That's what they did to JB. They hung em, called him a

> traitor and a terrorist. So every body's got to make a decision for themselves and it's a hard decision to make. But is JB a hero? Is he a terrorist? Is he a hero terrorist? Now personally I think he may have perhaps been aided to have some prosaic from time to time. We all have to make a decision on how to remember John Brown but I still think he is a contradiction wrapped up in an irony.

Both Frye and Garland do not differ so much in their thoughts on commemorating John Brown despite their disparate roles at Harpers Ferry. Both of them believed that history is not a product of one voice but instead a conflict between various voices that more often than not present offers multiple opinions of the past. They strive to highlight the various voices of the past and allow the present-day visitors to Harpers Ferry to recognize that the past they wish to learn about is a complicated past.

Both Frye and his park rangers working for the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park and Garland in his private tours neither back away from the argument of whether John Brown is a terrorist or a martyr[13] nor do they take a particular side of the argument. Instead, they present these inherently contentious discourses on Brown's identity and dissect the two sides of the argument with a spirit of neutrality and unbiased attitude.

The comparison between the two suggests that Harpers Ferry's identity as a tourist attraction necessitates the neutral commemoration of John Brown. Although the town transformed into a tourist attraction with the inception of the National Historic Park, even an independent storyteller who is not burdened by institutional requirements cannot out rightly proclaim Brown as a hero or a terrorist. How can one maintain a neutral stance on a figure as polarizing as John Brown? What are the politics behind this strategy of

[13] Both of these discourses signify the different interpretations of the violence inflicted by and inflicted upon John Brown during his raid at Harpers Ferry. As reflected in the quotations cited in chapter 1, the contestation on identifying Brown as a martyr and a terrorist or a bloodthirsty lunatic revolve around the question of legitimizing and dismissing Brown's religiosity.

neutrality? In what ways do the present-day commemorators of John Brown at Harpers Ferry, the Historic Park specifically, connect with the past in constructing a memory of John Brown as controversy?

Deconstructing Neutrality

The rhetoric of neutrality requires Park Rangers of the National Historic Park to abstain from sharing their opinions on John Brown. The authority to interpret John Brown's raid is instead endowed to the historical documents and artifacts of that time period. The role of the Historic Park in this ethos of neutrality is to perform the role of the mediator and enable these historic artifacts collected by the Park to communicate on its own to the visitors and enable them to reach their own conclusion on how to remember John Brown. Based on Halbwachs' thesis that remembering a past necessitates the reconstruction of that past, I contest the notion that the National Historic Park simply presents a preserved past so that the past could speak for itself.

Halbwachs' argues that the act of remembering does not sustain the past in its purest form and consequently problematizes my informant's suggestion that the past speaks for itself. The past can only be recollected, and societies do so by imagining the past in relation to its present-day cultural landscape (Halbwachs 1992: 2). Therefore, the labor of remembering does not simply preserve the past but in fact constantly invents that past. Society engages with its collective memory and renews this memory by uniting to perform various rituals (Halbwachs 1992: 9). The repetitive practice of rituals enables practitioners to embody the beliefs and values that those rituals seek to cultivate and

harness. In spite their attempt to let the past speak for itself, a similar process of reinvention of past is also plays out at the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park.

The Harpers Ferry National Historic Park retells John Brown's raid in the form of a historicized narrative that evokes the voices of historic characters involved in the raid. For instance, the John Brown museum collects quotations of people from the 1860's that express their reaction to Brown. The Park ensures that it collects quotations of all kinds: both those that picture Brown in a positive light and those that dismiss Brown. Therefore even though the Park does not necessarily adds its voice to the conversation on how to remember Brown, it nevertheless presents these various voices of the past in a form of conversation that enables the Park to conclude that John Brown was and continues to be a controversial figure. Those quotations as they stand-alone do not suggest Brown is controversial. Some suggest that Brown is a hero while others suggest that Brown is a failure. Some parallel Brown's hanging with Jesus' crucifixion while others portray Brown as a bloodthirsty lunatic. However, once visitors enter the John Brown museum and read these quotations aligned together, they are supposed to inherit the Park's message that John Brown is controversial. The John Brown museum thus functions as a site of ritual for visitors to the Park that fosters the memory of John Brown as controversial. In addition to the third floor of John Brown museum that I described in the previous chapter, a movie clip named "Getting Down with History" produced in the film series "Of the Student, By the Student, For the Student" by Harpers Ferry Middle School Students provides another example of how the youngsters inherit this practice of historicizing Brown's raid and addressing the various viewpoints on John Brown from major figures related to that time period.

Unlike the rest of the short movies, the students who directed and edited this one this one incorporates hip-hop music and break-dancing in the background. The movie starts off with a student who acts as if she were a reported from 1859 and she interviews famous figures from the time period of Brown's raid and asks then what they think of Brown's raid. The interviews are different into two section labeled as "Those Against it" and "Those With It". In the section "Those Against", the reporter interviews a student dressed as Robert E. Lee, another as the Mayor of Harpers Ferry, and the Governor of Virginia, each of whom present Brown in a negative light. Then the reporter interviews people who supported Brown's raid such as Henry David Thoreau. This short movie, like the rest of them, was produced under the guidance of the National Historic Park.

As the title of the movie clip "Getting Down with History" clearly suggests, the National Historic Park strives to historicize John Brown's raid. Before the young adults reach their own conclusion on how they intend to remember Brown, the Park strives to present them with the various contentious memories of Brown. However this strategy of neutrality fails to define John Brown or enable the visitors to connect with Brown in any productive capacity. Brown's identity remains undefined between the contrasting poles of "Those with him" and "Those against him" since the film does not actively support one side or another. In the following section, I examine the Park's interpretive model to explain the principles that guide such a neutral retelling of Brown's raid.

Principles of Interpretation

The historicized interpretation of John Brown's raid in many ways resonates with the liberal arts teaching philosophy. Teachers are not supposed to dogmatize the students to think in a certain way but rather to teach the students the various ways people have thought and then give the students control to construct their own ideas and arguments. This form of interpretation however does not signify that the past speaks for itself but rather reveals that the past is historicized and retold by the Historic Park. The Park informs the visitors about 'the unquestionable' details of what transpired during the raid to foster an environment where the visitors could then independently construe meaning of what they see and hear. The reconstruction of the past by the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park therefore represents a process of converting memory into a linear and verifiable history of John Brown's raid. In what follows, I closely examine a crucial document that authorizes this historicized form of interpretation.

The Interpretive Development Program formulated by the division of Interpretation provides detailed guidelines to the interpreter on the meaning of interpretation and its relevance for visitors. The first page of this guideline outlines *Freeman Tildren's Six Principles of Interpretation*, one of which states, "The Chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation". The second page outlines the Historic Park's Tenets of Interpretation which stresses the role of interpretation to "facilitate a connection between interests of the visitors and the meaning of the resources" that are presented to the visitors in exhibits. This connection however is not directed and authorized by the Park but instead signifies "the intellectual and/or emotional revelation" that the visitors reach on their own. Finally, the Historic Park formulates an equation that embodies the meaning and relevance of interpretation. This

equation goes as follows: KR (Knowledge of Resource) + KA (Knowledge of the Audience) * AT (Appropriate Technique) = IO (Interpretive Opportunity). The knowledge of Resource refers to facts related to the resources but these facts do not express a singular meaning. Instead the Knowledge of Resource section states that "there are many truths" and the facts are therefore supposed to foster "multiple perspectives and values". The final goal (Interpretive Opportunity) must address the following three criteria: a favorable set of circumstance for the visitor to construe meaning of resources, personal connection that the visitor makes to his or her personal life, and finally "connections" which refers to moments of intellectual and emotional spark. The Interpretive precepts of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park therefore seeks to engage the visitors with the resources, artifacts and exhibits but the "connection" is not supposed to be directed by the Park but rather could include any kind of intellectual and emotional spark felt by the visitor. With regards to John Browns' raid in particular, the interpretive model guides the Park interpreters on maintaining a neutral perspective.

The interpreter does not emphasize only one side of the story on John Brown's raid. For instance, the tour guides do not center on the Niagara Movement and how this group sanctified Brown during their visit to the John Brown's Fort. The tours do not encourage the visitors to take their shoes off and enter the hallowed ground of the Brown Fort. Instead, the tour guides highlight all the various voices of the past; intentionally falling short of suggesting its approval or disapproval of these voices. Such a holistic presentation of the various voices from the past however does not signify an absence of Brown's memory.

Instead this interpretive philosophy results in memorializing Brown as controversy. The strategy of neutrality that forms the basis of commemorating Brown as controversial is inextricably connected to the larger political program of moderating and rendering more palatable the story of Brown for contemporary Americans. This professed stance of neutrality seeks to mobilize John Brown's story for a secular project of cultivating an American identity, a tradition that emerged upon the inception of the National Historic Park.

Collective Memory and John Brown

The constant reconstruction of memories over a large period of time, according to Halbwachs, denotes the tradition of a given society. Therefore tradition, according to Halbwachs, does not differ from the collective memory of a society. Halbwachs further exemplifies the notion of collective memory as that which forms the tradition of a society. The Harpers Ferry National Historic Park constantly recreates the memory of Brown as controversial, thus fostering a tradition that recants the institution (i.e. the Historic Park) responsible for commemorating Brown from defining Brown. Halbwachs addresses the change in collective memory by arguing that tradition also periodically renews and reshapes in different moments of time when a community reconstructs its collective memory of the past on the basis of its changed social and political climate (Halbwachs 1992: 86). The inception of the National Historic Park signals the changed social and political climate of Harpers Ferry.

The preservation movement of mid-20th century that propelled the inception of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park amongst other Civil War battlefields sought to moderate the religious discourses embedded in the clash between North and South during the Civil War. The alternative commemoration of the Civil War took a form where "Patriotism itself became sacralized to the point that it enjoyed coequal or even superior status to conventional denominational faiths" (Stout, 2007: xvii). By sanctifying the shared American identity, these spaces sought to pacify the divisions based on regional identities between a southerner and a northerner, a Southern Buck and a Yankee. Retelling John Brown's raid however complicates the project of reconciliation and national unity that Civil War sites strive to achieve.

John Brown's raid represented an attack on America and his vision for an alternative nation-state expressed his discontent and lack of trust in the United States Constitution to emancipate the slaves and create a more just society. However numerous historians and biographers of John Brown such as Louis DeCaro remember him as the perfect embodiment of American principles as a man who sacrificed his life to fulfill the values of equality and justice. Therefore within this culture of the American Civil Religion where patriotism becomes a form of worship, John Brown remains a figure that can neither be valorized nor despised. Therefore Harpers Ferry National Historic Park as a federal institution produces the official memory of John Brown as controversial. In this transformed cultural setting where Americans from all over the country assembles to celebrate a shared cultural past, John Brown constantly divides them. Memorializing Brown as a controversy reflects the Park's resistance towards defining Brown, since defining him one way or another would alienate the Park from visitors who may not

agree with such a definition. Commemorative rituals in religious setting starkly contrast with this commemorative practice that fails to define Brown. The difference between the two forms of commemoration informs the difference on how the present-day commemorators imagine the past.

Controversy as a Memory Lacking Belief

Religious settings such as the one explored by Christian Novetzke in his book, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* employ a hagiographical narrative of the historic figure being commemorated. Through rituals that engage the believers with these hagiographical narratives, the believers emotionally connect and identify with the historic figure. Harpers Ferry National Historic Park on the other hand neither attracts its visitors towards nor repels from John Brown and instead maintains a neutral stance towards John Brown. The Memory of Brown as a controversy therefore signifies a memory that lacks the emotional attachment of a belief system.

In the second half of his thesis on collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs achieves a novel project of defining religious beliefs as a form of collective memory produced in a religious setting. He uses Christianity as his example to elaborate this thesis. He argues that Rites refer to bodies of "gestures, words, and liturgical objects established in a material form" (Halbwachs, 1992:116) and beliefs are collective remembrances that "interpreted these rites" (Halbwachs, 1992: 117). Rites are the "most

stable element of religion" because they are "constantly reproduced" and exhibit "uniformity in time and in space by rituals and the priestly body" (Halbwachs, 1992: 117). The past is not preserved because the past does not exist. Instead, like the case with other forms of collective memory, religious collective memory also "reconstructs the past with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts and traditions left behind by that past" (Halbwachs, 1992:119) and through this collective memory continually creates and recreates the beliefs that bind the collective group of a particular time period.

At present-day Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, the shared memory of John Brown as a controversial figure does not attempt to dogmatize the visitors or produce a singular, authoritative memory of Brown. The visitors may believe whatever they wish to believe pertaining Brown. Even though the Park encourages the visitor to make meaning out of their experience, the Historic Park does not authorize the content of that meaning. By historicizing the story of John Brown's raid and presenting the undeniable facts and accounts of the raid, the National Historic Park enables the visitors to reach their own conclusions about how they intend to remember John Brown's life and construe the significance of his actions and legacy.

The production of John Brown's memory as controversy therefore does not carry with it the emotional baggage of some sort of a religious belief. Rather it reflects the Park's attempt to resists defining Brown in memory in a way that a religious institution binds its followers with a persona. To say, I believe John Brown is a controversial figure professes a neutral stance where one could therefore define John Brown as a martyr or John Brown as a terrorist or both of these identities are relegated within the trope of controversy. Controversy therefore is less a belief itself and more a lexicon that attempts

to neutrally translate John Brown's religious beliefs, moderate the divisive reactions to Brown's raid and his hanging and render the narrative of John Brown in this cultural setting where a national identity is mobilized through the commemoration of the Civil War era. However why commemorate Brown as a controversy today if the controversial legacy emerges out of the context of the 1860's when Brown's raid created such a nation-wide uproar?

By memorializing Brown as a controversial figure, the National Historic Park suggests that the immediate context of the American Civil War may have dissipated, but traces of these memories continue to haunt contemporary Americans. The National Historic Park therefore must contend with an irresolvable contradiction. The very difference of opinions that it seeks to placate always threatens the promised condition in which difference is no longer threatening. This contradiction leads me to ask the following question: If John Brown must be memorialized as a controversy in a cultural landscape where Americans from all over the country reconnect with the Civil War, remember the fallen soldiers, and thus perform a patriotic ritual, does the notion of the Civil War as a shared cultural heritage hold true? To what extent does the commemoration of American Civil War not only attempts to forget the history of the war as a highly divisive war motored by conflicting religious discourses but also attempts to moderate divisions that continue to exist today and confesses to the struggle in doing so? In addressing this question, I return to Robert Bellah and relate my analysis of John Brown's commemoration as a controversy with his concern about the dangers posed to the American Civil Religion.

Brown contests the American Civil Religion

The notion of an American Civil Religion, according to Bellah, explains the mobilization of American identity. The religious metaphor such as imagining America as a Promised Land and fellow Americans as a Chosen People mainly represents the dominant ideology that attempts to unite Americans from different backgrounds towards proclaiming a shared American identity. Towards the conclusion of his book however, Bellah distinguishes between the ideology and the reality. He confesses that Americans are "not innocent, we are not savior of mankind and it is well for us to grow up enough to know that" (Bellah, 1975: 141). The covenant that binds Americans together, Bellah argues, is a broken covenant. Specifically, his concern lies with the increased modernization and the capitalist mode of production that has left "weakened our families and neighborhoods as it turned individuals into mobile, competitive achievers, undermined our morality and stripped us of traditions" (Bellah, 1975: 143). Specifically, he points out the devastation of the South that came about not only in the military warfare during the American Civil War but also in the "triumph of rapacious commercial values that followed it" (Bellah, 1975: 145). Bellah's concern therefore mostly lies in the corruption of America that came about with rise of commercialism and the obsession with material possession. He argues that during this moment of trial, we must look to the past to make our external covenant more meaningful. He calls for a "re-appropriation of tradition" (Bellah, 1975: 144), which offers us a "stimulus to rebirth" (Bellah, 1975: 144). Bellah consequently imports much significance to the past and advocates a remembering of the past that enables us to cultivate a national identity. Bellah fails to

notice however that the memories of the past not always bind Americans. Division within the American populace also emerges out of unresolved memories of the past. The case of John Brown exemplifies one such unresolved memory as institutions such as the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park struggle with the question of how to remember John Brown and the American Civil War.

Memory of John Brown has the potential to address racial tensions and heal the wounds created by racial divide because Brown, a white man, sacrificed his life to liberate the slaves. By memorializing Brown as a controversy however, the National Historic Park obfuscates the problem of race. It suggests that even though Brown may personify the reconciliation of racial division, he fails to reconcile the national division inflicted by the trauma of the American Civil War. Instead, as a figure remembered in relation to the American Civil War, he evokes a memory of the Civil War that further divides, rather than unifies Americans. The following two passages entail stories about the Park visitors. One of them is a story about a visitor from South Carolina that one of my informants shared with me. The other two stories emerged during my informal conversations with visitors to the Park.

In the following excerpt, my informant recollects his conversation with a lady from South Carolina who blames John Brown for starting the Civil War. The story goes as follows:

> One major section that I highlight in my tour is that always talked about HF as the start of the American Civil War, not Fort Sumter or South Carolina. And in this neighborhood it definitely started after his raid. If you showed up in Jefferson County, you were arrested because they were afraid you were going to break him free out of jail. And we

> are in the sesquicentennial. All of these events happened a 150 years ago when all these civil war events happened, and the board of Directors of the sesquicentennial committee voted us, Harpers Ferry, to be the official star of the American Civil War. These were guys from all of these civil war states planning these events. The historians here have been saying it for a few years. But officially it's been Fort Sumter. Frederick Douglas the great Civil Rights leader gave a very famous speech here in 1882 saying its not Fort Sumter, its John Brown and Harpers Ferry Virginia which is the start of the American Civil War.
> We are very happy about being the official star of the Civil War here because we need tourism and tourism means money for us. We are happy about that decision and I am figuring that the South Carolinians are not so happy about it. In the middle of our conversation this lady from South Carolina says I am damn happy about it. Why? I asked. It's about time they start blaming the guy who started that war. You've been blaming us South Carolinians for all these years.

According to this lady from South Carolina, the American Civil War continues to signify a traumatic event and she blames Brown's reckless raid at Harpers Ferry as the reason behind the start of the war. Her disgust for Brown not only reveals a highly negative recollection of the past but also highlights the continuing divide amongst Americans on how to remember the Civil War era, slavery and present-day race relations. She personifies the 'white problem', a metaphor opined by one of my informants on the continuing divide between blacks and whites in certain parts of America. Although nowhere in the above passage does she express a racist comment, her dismissal of John Brown and the ensuing Civil War leads me to question whether she admires Brown's struggle against slavery. In other words, does her criticism of Brown for starting the American Civil War suggest her acquiescence with the existence of slavery? In contrast

to the South Carolinian, a visitor to the Park from nearby Frederick Maryland painted a far more positive and triumphal narrative of John Brown and his role in the Civil War.

While climbing my way up to the Jefferson Rock, I met her and our conversation initially delved on the topic of the uncomfortable heat and humidity on that day but later once I mentioned John Brown, she showered praise on him as a man "who made the Emancipation Proclamation possible". "If it was not for him, who knows what would have happened to the slaves," she argued. Another visitor whom I met on the hill overlooking the town echoed her approval of John Brown's actions.

He was driving his way from Ohio to Tennessee and took a short break at Harpers Ferry where he decades ago used to live as an employee of the CSX railroad. While drinking his V-8 and Bud light cocktail, he recalled Brown as a man in a rush, stating, "He sure didn't want to waste much time". He understood slavery as a repugnant tradition that needed to be abolished sooner rather than later and Brown accordingly did "did not waste much time" to do so. These divergent recollections of Brown suggest that our collective memory of the American Civil War remains unresolved.

While some certainly look back upon that period in a positive light, arguing that John Brown's raid pushed the country to do away with slavery, others blame Brown for starting a war whose trauma and a sense of loss continues to linger amongst many Southerners such as the South Carolinian lady. John Brown's memorialization as a controversy therefore exemplifies the broken covenant in the nation's memory of the American Civil War. Although the National Historic Park welcomes visitors from the South and the North, celebrates the sacrifices of both the Northerners and Southerners, a

sense of agony and distrust continues to befall Americans in their recollection of the Civil War.

In order to strengthen our collective identity, Bellah stresses, "we must reaffirm the outward or external covenant and that includes the Civil Religion in its most classical form". He argues that although the "Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution have never been fully implemented", we should not lose our hopes on the promises of a more just covenant expressed in these sacred and "insist that they be fulfilled". However the question remains as to whether John Brown's memory could play a role in rescuing the broken covenant? The case study of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park suggests no.

The resistance to define Brown is a resistance to interpret his American identity. Although his raid sought to fulfill a worthy ideal, very few remember him as a great American because he decided to inflict violence in order to fulfill his religious motives. Some may hail him as a hero who sacrificed his life to liberate slaves but to others Brown remains a traitor whose violent acts put the country at war with each other. Sustaining these contentious memories by memorializing John Brown as a controversy reveals an un-biased and holistic approach of representing the past but it nonetheless inhibits framing John Brown as a historic figure whose memory could enable the nation to address present-day racial discriminations and racial tensions that continue to undermine a unified American identity. Brown's commemoration at Harpers Ferry consequently reveals a dialectics of addressing the American Civil Religion and revealing the shortcoming of the American Civil Religion.

Commemorating Brown as a controversy addresses the logic of the American Civil Religion in that it enables the Park to welcome Americans from all over the country. However it also exemplifies the failure of the American Civil Religion. The transformed cultural landscape of Harpers Ferry attempts to forget the violent and bloody history of the Civil War, the divisive reaction to the Civil War sustains its energy even today. Rather than pacifying the traumatic past, John Brown heightens it.

Chapter 5

Does John Brown need the Civil War?

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To conclude, commemorating John Brown as a controversy does not simply reflect John Brown's controversial legacy. It rather operationalizes in the cultural landscape of present-day Harpers Ferry that assembles Americans from all over the country to celebrate the shared past of the American Civil War. The National Historic Park therefore produces the memory of John Brown as a controversy in an attempt to pacify Americans who, according to the Park, inherit the divisive reaction to Brown's rid in 1859. I defend my thesis in three distinct chapters. In each of them I share my ethnographic data to explain the National Historic Park's commemoration of John Brown as a controversy.

In chapter two, I defend my methodology of interviewing employees of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park. I defend my claim that Harpers Ferry exemplifies a site where Bellah's idea of the American Civil Religion culture permeates. In this chapter, I historicize the National Historic Park, highlighting its inception as a by-product of a national preservation movement that demanded a memory of the Civil War to uplift the nation and heighten a patriotic fervor in preparation for World War II. Chapter three, the backbone of this thesis, addresses the central question in this thesis: how does the National Historic Park commemorate John Brown.

Through ethnography, I highlight the Historic Park's concern about John Brown's controversial legacy and reveal the strategy of neutrality by which the Park attempts to

address this concern. I especially attend to how the Park retells John Brown's raid to youngsters because the youngsters unlike many adult visitors to the Park may have never heard of John Brown before, other than reading the rare references to Brown in their history textbooks. My analysis of the Park's interaction with youngsters leads me to conclude that controversy evolves from a reflection of the conflicting views of Brown to a memory on its own constructed by Harpers Ferry National Historic Park.

I argue that although the Park strives to function as a three-dimensional classroom, it does not differ drastically from presentation of Brown's raid in history textbooks that students read in their usual classroom setting. I argue that both the Historic Park and the history classes in schools foster civic duties and strive to prepare these students to become future American leaders. John Brown's raid complicates this project and therefore both forms of educational institutions, the Historic Park and the schooling systems, resist defining Brown. This failure to define Brown reflects the Park's promise to maintain a neutral stance in its retelling of Brown's raid, which begs the question of how one can remain neutral in commemorating a figure as polarizing as John Brown? What does neutrality in this instance mean?

In the later half of my thesis, I challenge the notion that one could remain neutral in remembering John Brown. I argue that the notion of neutrality that the Park preaches in its commemoration of John Brown reflects a type of interpretation that aims to present a balanced reporting of various viewpoints on John Brown and allow the visitors to reach their own conclusion. It is therefore a form of interpretation that resists interpreting Brown. In remembering Brown as a controversy, Brown is un-remembered. I further tie my analysis of John Brown's commemoration as controversial with Bellah's concern of

the unfulfilled promise of the American Civil Religion in the latter half of his thesis. I argue that the resistance to define Brown and un-remember him as controversial reveals the shortcomings of commemorating Civil War as a shared cultural heritage. The necessity to un-remember John Brown reveals that Americans as a collectivity remain conflicted on how to interpret the Civil War.

John Brown was hanged a year before the official start of the Civil War. However the stories of the visitors and their perception of Brown that I share in chapter four reveals that Brown's memory is tied to the history of the Civil War. Those who consider him a hero do so because they find his success in the emancipation of slaves at the conclusion of the Civil War. On the other hand, his detractors blame him for igniting the devastation of the Civil War that continues to invoke animosity and defeat. The contentious memories of John Brown reflect the inability of contemporary Americans to share a unified meaning and significance of the American Civil War.

Why is it significant that Americans have yet to come to terms with the American Civil War? The event transpired more than a century and a half ago so why would the manner we remember it today matter? Emancipation Proclamation, one of the cornerstone products of the American Civil War, legally abolished slavery and in doing so raised the hope for racial equality. A century and a half later, that hope remains unfulfilled. Although slavery no longer exists, racism does.

Memory of John Brown has the potential to heal the wounds created by racial divide because Brown, a white man, sacrificed his life to liberate the black slaves. But since his memory ties him to the American Civil War, he remains controversial.

Although the National Historic Park mobilizes Americans and elevates the status of Harpers Ferry as a historic town, it has yet to address the problem of racial divide.

Extending Brown out of himself

The lexicon of controversy reconstructs the narrative of Brown's life because it extends John Brown beyond his life. Brown himself did not live to see the start of the Civil War but many today consider his raid at Harpers Ferry to be the hinge event that ignited the Civil War. But what if the Civil War had never occurred? What if John Brown's raid had actually succeeded in freeing the slaves? Terry Bisson in *Fire on the Mountain* conducts precisely such a re-imagination of the past.

In his retelling of Brown's raid, the raid no longer occurs in October. It occurs on July 4th, the American Independence Day. Moreover, unlike the actual raid, Harriet Tubman accompanies John Brown. The raid does not end with Brown's capture in the Engine Fort. He instead succeeds in emancipating the slaves and these slaves congregate together to form their own nation in the south called Nova Africa. The Civil War does not represent a struggle to unify the country. Instead, the war represents a vicious attack by Abraham Lincoln to capture Nova Africa. He therefore is not the savior of the Union but rather a warmonger. He fails. Nova Africa remains a nation, independent of white control and progresses towards a socialist utopia. Unlike the Civil War that resulted with an immense feeling of loss and defeat amongst the southerners, Bisson's re-imagined past depicts a proud Nova Africa. However it also signals the defeat of America as one collective nation but in precisely such a defeat of America does Brown succeed and

remembered as a hero. Although Bisson's account of the raid and the after effects of the raid do not reflect the actual history of that past, it does capture the problem of defining Brown's American identity. A major struggle in defining John Brown's American identity is interpreting his martyr identity.

Where I go from here

Prominent scholars of Religious Studies such as post-colonial theorist Ananda Abeysekara have argued that secular nation-states confront an irresolvable contradiction. (Abeysekara, 2008: 14) The very diversity and pluralism that they strive to foster constantly threatens their own sovereignty. Moreover, the very domain of the secular stands authorized by defining the limits of what can and cannot count as religion. This authorization assumes that religion, just like life, is always available for translation and critique. Moreover, when passed through the scrutiny of secular critique, religion becomes available for moderation, substitution, and extension beyond itself. However, and this is the critical point, the secular promise of moderating life/religion remains an impossibility; it remains a promise that is always deferred to the future.

In the future, I plan on further expanding this paper and engage with recent conversations among religious studies scholars invested in theorizing the interplay of religion and the secular nation-state. I plan on asking the following question: how does the translation of Brown's life as a 'controversial figure' stands authorized by a broader secular promise of translating an object of critique called 'religion' that remains readily available to be moderated, domesticated, and extended beyond itself? In what ways does

the commemoration of John Brown as a controversy reflect larger contradictions pregnant in the ideology of American secularism?

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